

KATHY ACKER (1971-1975)

KATHY

ACKER



You are on the
enemy list of
The Black Tarantula

Kathy Acker — The Golden Woman (ca. 1969-1970)
 Section from DIARY (1-2/1971)
 Portraits (7/1971)
 Portraits and Visions (ca. summer 1971)
 Diary Warmcatfur (1/1972)
 Politics (pub. 5/1972)
 For H. (ca. 5/1972)
 Revolutionary Diary of an Anarchist (ca. 5/1972)
 Journal Black Cats Black Jewels (summer 1972)
 Gold Songs for Jimi Hendrix (ca. summer 1972)
 Breaking Up (ca. summer 1972)
 [Letters to Bernadette Mayer] (summer-fall 1972)
 Homage to LeRoi Jones (fall 1972)
 [Letter to Bernadette Mayer] (ca. fall 1972)
 Entrance into Dwelling in Paradise (fall 1972)
 [Exercises] (fall 1972)
 Stripper Disintegration (2-3/1973)
 Section from Diary (3/1973)
 [Letter to Bernadette Mayer] (6/27/1973)
 The Beginning of the Thesmophoriazousae (7-9/1973)
 Part I of Breaking Through Memories into Desire (11/1973)
 Part II [of Breaking Through Memories...] (ca. 1/1974)
 Conversations (1/1974)

Peter Gordon — Talking as Music (2/1974)

Kathy Acker — From Part III of Breaking Through Memories... (2/1974)
 [Letters to Alan Sondheim] (2-3/1974)
 [Letter to Bernadette Mayer] (3/3/1974)

Kathy Acker & Alan Sondheim — [Untitled Tape 1] (3/1974)

Emily Cheng — [About the Untitled Tape 1] (ca. 3/1974)

Kathy Acker & Alan Sondheim — [Untitled Tape 2] (3/1974)

Kathy Acker — Various Memory Experiments, I (4/1974)
 [Letters to Bernadette Mayer] (4-7/1974)

Alan Sondheim — [Postcard to Kathy Acker] (7/24/1974)

Kathy Acker — [Letters to Bernadette Mayer] (10/1974-10/1975)

Jill Kroesen — [Songs] (1974-1976)

Kathy Acker & Alan Sondheim — [Flyer for the Whitney Museum] (11/1976)

† C. Finch - Introduction † A. Sondheim - About the Tape † E. Cheng - About
 the Tape † J. Gajoux - 14th Street studio † J. Gajoux - Acker and sex work
 † A. M. Pinaka - Porno-graphing † M. Viegner - Afterword

w/ notes
 by J. Gajoux & C. Finch

editor: Justin Gajoux ————— artwork: Satarina Cantos

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I might make with my hand the movement I should make if I were holding a hand-saw and sawing through a plank; but would one have any right to call this movement sawing, out of all context? — (It might be something quite different!)

– Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §350 –

My mother is a fabulous liar for instance she doesn't bother to tell believable lies because she realizes once I know she's lying I can't call her bluff it doesn't matter.

– K. Acker, letter to A. Sondheim, Feb.-March 1974 –

I might have to keep calling myself Kathy Acker so they believe I'm telling the truth

– K. Acker, letter to B. Mayer, July 1974 –

The discourse of bad faith.

THE PROCESS OF TRUTH-MAKING. In the judicial trial all the declarations of the persons interrogated (the litigants and the witnesses) are *a priori* veridical [*veridicus*]. The sincerity of a witness can be doubted, contradiction can be revealed in his testimony, discredit can be brought upon him, but nevertheless his statements remain veridical. At first, because they are real (officially recorded). Also, because the interrogated is legally obliged to speak truly and is presumed to be doing so. In the frame of the judicial procedure a lie wouldn't have a place as such, it would need the opening of another procedure to be considered as a lie. Moreover, as there is no debate available through which the locutors of a trial could come to agree upon a common truth, each declaration bears a particular veridicality. The touchstone for this variety of veridicalities is the resolute fact [*factum*] decided by the judge. Only from the standpoint of this judgement can be known how true [*verus*] a declaration is. Truth-value is thus relative to the *fact*, but the fact isn't only the product of an arbitrary decision: firstly, because at each step legal regulations and conventions are supposed to guarantee its objectivity; secondly, because the judiciary requires that prior to all discourses intervening over the course of the trial there should be a *reality* that can be exactly apprehended and expressed, constituted of *things* and *subjects* which can be interrelated and whose history can be precisely registered in time and space. The interrogated's discourses draw their meaning from this *reality*, which, in the economy of the trial, they have the exclusive responsibility to invoke and make manifest for the judge. Therefore, the judicial trial leaves no place for falsity, it only knows different degrees of factuality: reality, veridicality, truth.

HOW CAN AN INTERROGATED TALK. In the judicial trial good faith and bad faith characterize a subject depending on whether he has or not the knowledge that

he is acting against the law, and whether he has or not the will to conform with the law. Good faith and bad faith are modes for the execution of an offense (not motives of complaints as such) distinguishing types of defendants by their single- or double-mindedness, by their sincere or insincere attitude. In a real trial, good faith or bad faith can qualify only the defendant. In the *logical* space of the trial however – which is the context of our reflexion here –, good faith or bad faith can qualify all the interrogated locutors (namely the litigants and the witnesses). Because those are the locutors in a trial who have the responsibility to impartially inform the court depending on their obtained knowledge, their discourses – which are to be constituted as *evidence* from which to judge – have to take a *declarative* [ἀποφαντικός – apophantic] form. As such they are the only discourses in the frame of the trial that are concerned with *faith*, which, whether *bad* or *good*, points to the expected relations between one's attitude and one's knowledge (what one knows and what one should do as a result of this knowledge). The *declaration* has as its main function to state relations between determinable places, times, objects and subjects which can be either confirmed or denied. Such a discourse is addressed to two main authorities: the judicatory (judge) and the critical (attorneys).

TO DO WHAT ONE KNOWS AND TO KNOW WHAT ONE DOES. The legal concepts of bad and good faith presuppose: that one's actions (discourse included) can always be articulated to one's knowledge; that one's actions should preferably reflect what one knows. In the logical space of the trial, good faith qualifies an attitude sincerely proceeding from ignorance: one doesn't have sufficient knowledge to understand his actions and their consequences, deeds and discourses have thus *overlooked* one or several aspects of *reality* which the judge consider to be factually true. Bad faith, on the contrary, is an attitude intended to pretend ignorance of what one knows, or to pretend one's knowledge is different from what it is actually. The locutor in bad faith thus knows what he hides and knows that he hides, but nevertheless hopes to convince the audience that what he expresses really reflects his grounds of knowledge. While good faith doesn't know enough, bad faith threatens the judiciary as it knows more than it shows, and maybe even more than the court – it seems to potentially always know too much.

WHEN FANTASY CONTAMINATES FACTS. From the physical point of view, natural sciences are the recognized authority for the identification of causes and consequences. From the social point of view the judiciary is the only recognized authority that can truly attribute actions and things to subjects, and thus that can create authentic *facts* (and not mere hypotheses). In this frame, bad faith and good faith then both characterize a discourse that *pretends* to be a veridical ground to base judgement on, but which truly isn't. Both concepts denounce the partiality of one's expression of truth – good faith's ignorance itself tends to imply minimal responsibility: abdication of one's will-to-know rather than pure innocence. Then, whereas the judge is expecting a mimetic discourse, mirroring in all its parts what happened (*reality*), he gets instead a narrative stemming from fantasy and personal

interest, which he can't define explicitly as such before the judgement. Good faith and bad faith, in a logical space where all declarations are veridical, penetrate surreptitiously into the making of *facts*, and thus characterize attitudes not only toward grounds of knowledge, but also toward the judiciary. Good faith equates to subservience, through its conviction that one acts transparently, and exists with integrity between thoughts and actions. At the same time, bad faith equates to deliberate subversion of the procedure, playing rhetorically with the conditions of belief, and, further, sabotaging the legal contractual system.

GOOD FAITH IS A FORM OF BAD FAITH. The aforementioned transparency shows that good faith characterizes the subject principally as a willing mind, and it considers his life only secondarily, as if the latter were determined by sincerity. The willing mind in good faith experiences coherency and unity between its knowledge and its intentions only inasmuch as it is separated from its actions as realities in the world. Or, inasmuch as the mind abdicates its inquiry into the meaning and consequences of actions. Thus, the integrity of this subject, formed and framed under the law, rests on ignorance. He closes his eyes in order not to experience this terrifying division. Good faith then reveals itself to be only a more abstract form of bad faith: it doesn't deny positive knowledge, but rather possibilities of knowing. And it hides this denial behind ignorance and intentions.

BAD FAITH IS NOT LYING BECAUSE IT PLAYS REALITY AGAINST TRUTH. Hence, it is only logical that bad faith should characterize one's whole life, as it is an attitude requiring a total involvement. One acts in such way so as to appear convinced of a different knowledge than he already has, and thus involves his body, mind and responsibility in this decision. Bad faith plays *reality*, through deeds and words, against *truth*. Actions don't proceed logically from knowledge anymore, they even seem to precede knowledge in importance, as they create, by suggestion, the possibility of their comprehension. But it is important to understand that the bad faith subject in the judicial space isn't a *liar*. A liar separates himself from the object, he acts as a conscience in control from *outside* — He is outside of the object, and outside of his conscience dealing with the object. A conscience which doesn't need to convince the other: the liar knows reality, knows that he speaks falsely, knows exactly which alteration to perform and that nobody at that moment can verify the content of his lie, he knows he is the only one to know. Thus the liar subscribes to the judicial architecture of facticity, substituting the only element he cares about in the system of truth (but, when a lie starts to bear consequences it has to become bad faith).

BAD FAITH ESCAPES GRABBING THE INFINITY OF THE POSSIBLE. Contrary to the liar, the bad faith subject, whereas he knows what he hides and knows he hides, can't articulate his attitude with this knowledge: he experiences the way he acts as unrelated, distant, he doesn't face his denial. Here, the conscience doesn't control deeds from the standpoint of knowledge; conscience dives into actions and here it locks itself up: the subject in bad faith objectifies himself in attitudes, which he pretends to be only very distantly and indirectly related to what he already knows. To

escape, and to momentarily convince himself and those who have good grounds not to believe him, he resorts to the infinity of the possible: in a desperate move he grabs all imaginable meanings to demonstrate things in a different light, his imagination is as profuse as the knowledge at stake is localized. The bad faith locutor concentrates all his self in expressions and gestures, reasonings, feigned behaviors, inhabiting a present with blinders which is essentially a rush toward a reality only negatively qualified as *that-world*, where he should be no more implicated in the cognition at stake. Since bad faith grows in the zone of doubt, such a life loses all reliability, which in the judicial procedure is the worst infamy.

BAD FAITH CAN'T SURVIVE BECAUSE KNOWLEDGE NEVER STAYS HIDDEN. Such attitudes are difficult to prolong much. In the judicial space, both good faith and bad faith are almost impossible to sustain. On the basis that reality is normatively constituted by interactions of rigid identifiable entities in a rational time-space, knowledge in the judicial procedure is objectified, is always already crystallized, therefore one cannot hope to escape or dissolve it. One can't ignore what he knows, and one that doesn't know will have to. The judicial assumes knowledge has to reveal itself: prejudice is the drive to draw all the potential of reality's built coherence in order to establish the truth. To put it in others words: the court has to deliver a judgement, so facts will come to light. Therefore, the essence of bad faith in the judicial space isn't so much how it competes with knowledge, as it knows the battle is lost, but rather how it works with conviction.

KNOWLEDGE CONTROLS BAD FAITH THROUGH MAGIC. But before introducing the theme of conviction, it is important to underline that, against all appearances, bad faith relates to knowledge not only negatively – through denial and distance – but also positively through magic influence. Between knowledge and the attitudes of bad faith, causal logic and free-willed agency are substituted by possession and fascination [*fascinatio*]. The cognition that one forbids himself to express, once segregated from the current of discourses and actions, is always looking sideways at the subject. It asks to be associated with the rest of his expressions, while at all moments he has to make sure it isn't. Knowledge thus crystallizes as an obsession that bewitches the mind, and from the place of its exile, fertilizes imagination in order to produce an ever-evolving expression that won't profane it.

BAD FAITH CREATES NON-PERSUASIVE EVIDENCES. In the judicial space, every declarative discourse is veridical and, thus, should be evaluated. It always provokes some belief, even more so if said with the tone of certainty. Nevertheless, the evidence provided by the bad faith locutor, through his declarations and attitudes, is not persuasive to him. He thus creates a special type of sign, *non-persuasive evidences*. The locutor in bad faith is predisposed not to believe the very possibilities he suggests and the arguments he furnishes; he has decided, ahead of time, not to become sincere. The *non-persuasive evidence*, therefore, characterizes a discourse: one grounded in fantasy rather than in knowledge, a discourse that can convince but has no chance to become objectively true as knowledge never stays hidden,

and whose effectiveness is brief. Such a discourse remains unmasked only the amount of time of doubt, *i.e.* the time of the trial, since the procedure represents a momentary suspension of judgement until all evidence has been presented and the resolute fact pronounced.

BAD FAITH BREAKS OUT A SPACE OF ITS OWN IN THE PROCESS OF TRUTH-MAKING. By convincing the audience with his non-persuasive evidences, the bad faith locutor demonstrates that knowledge doesn't bring belief because of some intrinsic quality, but only because of normative logical-pragmatic conditions that a fake discourse could also fulfill. Moreover, the bad faith locutor breaks open a new space through the procedure. As a trial opens because of a prejudice, that should in the end be transformed into a *fact*, it requires the assumption that subjects are free agents, and, thus, that the question of will should be at the center of the procedure. But actions that depend on will or fantasy aren't what are expected from the litigants or the witnesses during the trial. They are supposed to obey the rules of the procedure, to answer questions, and to stick to what they know. Subservience is what should be their attitude, for the good reason that any action springing out of fantasy or unrestrained will threatens to provoke new prejudices and to open another procedure. Thus, bad faith, by deciding that all convictions could spring from non-persuasion, opens a new relation with the audience, opposite to the relation the judicial authorizes.

In the judicial process, the conviction aroused by the discourses is only directed toward the rendering of a judgement. Evidence doesn't create relations between locutors, but only adds up like a series of virtual weights on a scale, or virtual pieces in a puzzle. What is at stake is the truth, and what is sought after is justice through the creation of a fact. All actors in the trial deal with the objective truth as if it existed yet unshaped, ready to take a form, in between them. They modify this diffuse truth, one after the other, without knowing in what way they do so and without dialoguing to reach agreement. Thus, conviction as result of evidence and discourse is instrumental to the ultimate *conviction* of guilt.

The fundamental relation of a trial is therefore agonistic, between opposed parties, but this relation is subsumed – as a conflict between people – into the court's objective inquiry into truth. Thus, the trial doesn't create direct relations between subjects, it only relates subjects to things, and to the owners of things. On the contrary, bad faith talks directly to everyone present, trying to get them to hear it out. It isn't instrumental to the *conviction* of guiltiness for the judicature; it attempts to create *belief* horizontally, within each person listening. If only one person goes along with the possibilities propelled by bad faith, doubt and the distanciation, created through knowledge, can still be maintained.

BAD FAITH IS PROGRAMMED TO STAY SUSPENDED IN BELIEF, BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH. Since bad faith always goes toward the loss of its truth-value, until facts are finally revealed, it is programmed as a discourse to be cut-out from the grounds of knowledge and from the normative *telos* of truth. Bad faith is programmed to remain solely in the dimension of belief. But if the judicial fails to

grasp the relation – negatively through escape and positively through magic – of bad faith with *present* knowledge of reality, it also fails to consider that such a discourse could relate to knowledge that doesn't exist yet. The distance that bad faith maintains with the prohibited cognition is transported in the epistemological field: rather than causally, the discourse of bad faith can relate distantly, and somehow magically, to realities that are in the process of coming, or else that have already passed. So bad faith allows for knowledge of times beyond what the judicial rationality allows. Thus, if it isn't a discourse that can be, at the moment of its broadcast, constituted as knowledge in the logic of the judicial space, it can always turn into knowledge later.

BAD FAITH MAKES FICTION POSSIBLE. Belief is the mode under which the discourse of bad faith is received by the audience, inasmuch as it isn't positively instrumental to the conviction made by the judge/the conviction of the culprit. For this reason, it is the only declarative discourse in a trial that has the capacity to not be *evidence*. As *evidence*, it could only be used to accuse its locutor. It is at the cost of his infamy, which isolates him, that the bad faith locutor can reach each person in the audience. And it is also because his discourse has no truth value, that it can become a sign for multiple possible meanings. The bad faith locutor loses all capacity to be *trusted* in contracts, and he puts at stake, in a fundamental way, the possibility of a contractual society through his non-convincing evidence. So the bad faith locutor is the figure, in the terms of the judicial rationality, who makes fiction possible. Fiction as a transversal rhetoric that breaks through the hierarchical structure of the real, the veridical, and the truth.

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This isn't a theory of the origins of "literature." Only an attempt to draw out a conceptual space, where the understanding of a particular mode of speaking can be reopened. This type of questioning is what Editions Ismael tries to carry out, not only into critical reflexion, but also into editorial practice. How can doing "critical editions" of texts imply destroying Literature as a value, as well as the economic-hermeneutic structure that creates it? It is an ambitious program, the fulfillment of which we pretend to perform, but the consequences of which we can't hope to realize.

It is also a paradoxical program, as the editor finds himself in the position of a "judge", having to create facts (events and meanings) from evidence. The idea of "critical editing," since it was performed on Biblical and Hellenic texts, through philological and historical methodologies, is to produce the most exact, accurate, enclosed text, insofar as this text can be deduced from circumstances, contexts, and milieu. In other words, "critical editing" aims to produce the most reliable literary objects, in order to allow more authoritative interpretations of them.

Yet at the same time, hermeneutics for "Literature" in France, especially since the 1950s, have often assumed their object as obvious and already defined. The

modern text was supposed to be a self-sufficient system, which could be decoded through the analysis of its inner structures. Biography, history, were discarded as exterior to the textual space. Textual space which could eventually be substantiated as participating in *the* literary space: meaning that specific fabric that characterizes “Literature” as value.

As any inquiry for truth, “critical editing” allows us to raise methodical doubt about crystallized notions and habits. The historical method could thus become a tool, through over-contextualizing, over-particularizing, to pierce and fragment the assumed unity of literary works. What does it mean to present a text, trying to understand all of its signs as singularities capable of redefining our understanding of writing and reading from the bottom up? Such an idea is one of the horizons we try to work toward.

To present writing as a series of actions and, at the same time, to make hermeneutics more porous to life, suggest another risk. The critic becomes at ease with the preconception that writing is, at each moment the expression of one’s life. He expresses such a preconception by saying: either that each part of a text is the result of a *decision* that engages morally its author, as if the page was an ethical space where one would make *his* choices; or that each part of a text is a translation of energies, is energy transferred from where the poet got it, by way of the text itself, all the way over to the reader. With the moralistic approach, grounded on the concepts of subjective unity and free-will, the critic threatens writing by submitting it to a new set of values which undermine practices seeming less “heroic”, as well as utilitarian and rhetorical forms. On the other hand, with the vitalist approach, the text is over-determined by the author’s biological body (as the medium and milieu between hid thoughts and the universe). The text is even considered a part of this individual body and of the world it inhabits, so much that non-autobiographical and non-psychologically-causally-explainable meanings become impossible. Thus, in a world after god, the text becomes or a sign for an intention, or for an emotion/an event, instead of a sign for truth. The normative figure of the author, free-will, crystallizes in front of the normative textual object, life’s excretion; their attributes are the same. But writing can’t presuppose one form of being; critical reading should thus address the text, resorting excessively to ethics, history, psychology, biography, and all other possible dimensions unfolding with a text, as a machine to produce forms of being beyond norms.

So, “critical editing” as we intend it to be – a “critical editing” squared – doesn’t so much build up knowledge, as it tries to invent practices to sabotage the grounds of what we know about writing. Each Editions Ismael book does so differently, over and over again. Not to escape all relationship with cognition, obviously, but to provoke new relationships. To emphasize the potential of unusual ways to relate discourse with experience.

Narratives you know are purely for shit.
Here's the information go fuck yourself.

– *Rip-off Red: Girl Detective*, p. 53–

This book is the first attempt to produce a critical edition of a large number of Kathy Acker's unpublished early works. Apart from the posthumous publication, in 2002, of the early manuscript *Rip-off Red, Girl Detective* and *The Burning Bombing of America: The Destruction of the U.S.* by Amy Scholder and Grove Press in one volume, in 2002, as well as Gabrielle Kappes' chapbook, no other important publication had been attempted in this field.

The following – mostly unpublished – texts were all composed between 1969 and 1976. Yet they are representative of Acker's published output only for the period running from 1971 to early 1974. These texts all exist as “clean” typewritten copies, probably intended to be kept, shown, maybe even published. The editor chose not to include Acker's manuscripts. The transcriptions in this volume were made directly from the original typescripts. Original pagination, manuscript addenda, missing pages and other idiosyncrasies of each file have been preserved; our editorial notes at the end of the texts all feature a material description of the source version used.

The organization of this volume is chronological. The texts' respective date of composition is often the result of an estimate based on their content and form (an estimate that is then justified and defended).

Such a collection shows how prolific, diverse and always in-progress Acker's production was in those years. It isn't, however, Acker's *complete* early works. More typescripts exist at the Fales Library which aren't featured or alluded to in this book. Their publication and analysis may in the future suggest a whole new set of interpretations that will, or might not, contradict the present editor's exegesis. Moreover, the comparison of the typescripts with manuscript versions will undoubtedly inspire new perspectives on Acker's creative process and intentions during those years.

Spelling mistakes and misprints were kept as they are in the originals.

Blank spaces in the texts were reproduced as faithfully as possible.

[CF] *At the end of a note, indicates its author is Claire Finch. All other editorial notes are from the editor.*

The dating system adopted is month / day / year or month / year. — We used the astrological calendar when referring to seasons. Thus, the summer

season starts on June 21 and the fall season starts on September 21.

Numbers in brackets [] stand for typescripts' original pagination.

Dates and titles in brackets [] were added by the editor.

/ a dash in a quote stands for a line break.

The reader should consider all typos, repetitions, and other anomalies in the transcriptions, as part of the original texts.

CLAIRE FINCH — ARE YOU SURPRISED
THAT KATHY ACKER WAS AN ARIES BECAUSE I'M NOT

The white sky bulges like an eyeball swiveled back
in someone's head. Bits of virus cultured by the
prison medical staff for testing on the inmates
are released periodically from smokestacks into
the bruised sky. The membranes lining Debbie's
mouth and nose and throat are colonized
instantly by spores and Debbie knows the prison
grows inside of her, composed of the cells of her
own tissue.

– Laurie Weeks¹ –

When I found the texts, I ate them, I sucked
them off, I nursed them, I fucked them. I'm the
innumerable child of their mob.

– Hélène Cixous² –

HAVE
MORE
SEX

– Elodie Petit / Arthur Rimbaud the Dyke³ –

I want to talk about queer literary practice up against literary history.
I also want to talk about immortality because the thought of living forever gets
me wet.

Did you know that Valerie Solanas was less about violent castration than she
was about freeing the medical technology to stop all disease forever? She thought
that the rich guys were keeping it secret, letting us die because fear of death is
the only way to keep us all working shit jobs. Of course sometimes love for art is
stronger than fear of dying and that's something I always liked about Kathy Acker.
There's a French performance artist named Rébecca Chaillon whose work is the
best I've ever seen, she's a closeted Marina Abramović fan and I guess you could
say that she's like Abramović, if only in terms of power and simplicity only she's a
dyke and the daughter of parents who grew up in Martinique.⁴ She works a lot
with food. The first time I ever saw her perform she ate a stick of lipstick then ate

1. Laurie Weeks, "Debbie's Barium Swallow," *The New Fuck You: Adventures in Lesbian Reading*, Cambridge MA: Semiotext(e), 1995.

2. Hélène Cixous, *Entre l'écriture*, Paris: des Femmes, 1986. My translation.

3. Elodie Petit, *Arthur Rimbaud la gouine, Suce Subalterne: Arthur Rimbaud la Gouine*, Paris: Editions Douteuses 2018 / Bagnole FR: Rotolux Press, 2019. Trad. Claire Finch, *The Subaltern Suck by Arthur Rimbaud the Dyke*, forthcoming 2019.

4. Cf. Rébecca Chaillon, *Où la chèvre est attachée, il faut qu'elle broute (Carpet Muncher)*, Paris: L'Arche agence théâtrale, 2019: <www.arche-editeur.com/piece/ou-la-chevre-est-attachee-il-faut-quelle-broute-1684> [accessed: August 1, 2019].

a whole blood sausage—raw. The 6-foot sausage was curled around her neck like a boa and she bit the end off of it and sang Aretha Franklin into the other end, sometimes she bites into it, some dark crumbles of raw meat surge up out of the casing EVERY POLITICAL MOMENT CREATES ITS COMMENSURATE FORM and fall to the floor, creeping around her like confetti. It was Rébecca who told me to read the obscure parts in Valerie Solanas, one of those times when I was talking to her again about Kathy Acker. There are all these weird parts in the S.C.U.M. Manifesto that no one ever quotes from, maybe because talk of immortality is less catchy than, *If SCUM ever marches, it will be over the President's stupid, sickening face; if SCUM ever strikes, it will be in the dark with a six-inch blade.*¹ Valerie Solanas must have been a Cancer because later in the manifesto her language gets insane and gooey, she writes that after murder, abolition of capital, and the freeing of medical technology, *in actual fact female function is to explore ... crack jokes, make music—all with love. In other words, create a magic world.*² Kathy Acker, on the other hand, was definitely an Aries – all that fire and she dressed so well. “Plus,” I say to Rébecca, “In Acker, at the end of the world isn’t radical woman-only love, but indefinable beauty and an endless highway full of motorcycles, yet empty of commercial novelists and the uncool.”

“Yeah,” Rébecca says back, “But Solanas isn’t talking about a utopia for the future, she wants it NOW: *SCUM is too impatient to hope and wait for the debrainwashing of millions of assholes. Why should the swinging females continue to plod dismally along with the dull male ones? Why should the fates of the groovy and the creepy be intertwined?*”³ I often feel this way when I’m reflecting, as I’m wont to do, on the state of dyke literature. I’m ready to be at a party of the exclusively groovy. Kathy Acker wrote in *The Guardian* in 1997 when she chose alternative cancer treatment, that *The reduction of all that one is to materiality is a necessary part of the practice of conventional western medicine.*⁴ Solanas promises that once we have eradicated the rich men, we’ll live forever. This is something that dykes have always known, because once you become a dyke you kind of drop off the biopolitical treadmill and find yourself ten years younger, camped out in an inlet of living where there’s a party every night and you never have to get married. At one such party I say to whoever will listen, *I’m not trying to claim Kathy Acker for the dykes, I’m trying to claim all of literature for the dykes. Or at least, everything that’s any good.* Power, we’ve known it since at least 1968, isn’t a top-down avalanche but a bottom-up and everywhere-else kind of vaporous trickle. And *dyke literature oozes, it’s excessive, it’s emotional, it gets everywhere. It’s built from mutated, improbable heaps of whatever we decided to keep.*

Ok but if I were to try to claim Kathy Acker for the dykes I *might* say that the early

1. Valerie Solanas, *S.C.U.M. Manifesto*, Oakland CA: AK Press, 2001 (1967).

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. Kathy Acker, “The Gift of Disease,” *The Guardian*, January 18, 1997.

Acker in this book is Dyke Acker. Being a dyke has nothing to do with your assigned parts, it's more like what Nicole Brossard calls a "motivation," aka a way of moving through the archive and the everyday. As a friend who's a queer ecologist wrote me in an email, "It's not only that theory is cisnormative, it's that I'm recommending the abolition of the nuclear family for the good of ALL of us." Dyke Acker is interested in inventing a protocol that breaks down what she identifies as repressive structures in language, education, and the family. Dyke Acker wants to use the body to find a way out of normative patterns of domination. Rébecca Chaillon puts on a swimsuit and invites people in the audience to spit water at her. There are some of her friends who do it, who pour the water really gently over her head. Then these guys come and they fill their throats, when they spit they fling their heads all the way back and use their height to accelerate the impact *Refusal of the reduction to meat*. Dyke Acker asks, how can we express the emancipatory uses of the body through an embodied writing practice? Friends overwhelm the boys and Rébecca Chaillon's performance ends with people rinsing the spit off of her with water poured softly from their own mouths, she inspires the audience to surround her in protection. *I don't feel like fighting, I've already given enough, but thanks anyway. I want to get out of here, go far, get the fuck out and start over with people who are like me. People who know, people who are tired, people who want to disappear, people who want to make anger into renewable energy, and then renew it. I want to use all this fire to bake some bread, instead of to incinerate myself. But you can't do something like that.*¹ Near the end of her life Acker will write a lot about bodybuilding and body modification. But when she starts out she starts out writing about sex "What cannot be overestimated is the pleasure Kathy took in writing porn, finding the exactly right cadence and rhythm: using language, pushing limits, turning on."² I'm introducing this book full of Acker's early texts, all of them from before she was thirty and in them we watch her develop a protocol for expressing what feels good to her and could feel good to you or to someone else, too. "Soon he began questioning me about acts he found most disgusting and so most wanted to commit." We watch her try out a variety of formats. In a funhouse labyrinth where dykes are in charge, the way out isn't giving your all to a no-good lover, like Ariadne has to do because she's stuck in a straight myth. Instead it's refusing to believe that SEEING IS BELIEVING. Kathy unbuttons her jeans, the ones that are too big so they have to be held up with a makeshift belt otherwise they fall down she says "to one inch

1. Rébecca Chaillon, *Où la chèvre est attachée, il faut qu'elle brouste*, from unpublished manuscript, courtesy of the author. My translation. The original text in French: "Moi j'ai pas envie de me battre./ J'ai déjà donné, merci. / Je voudrais juste me barrer d'ici, loin, me casser et recommencer avec des personnes comme moi. des personnes qui savent, des personnes qui sont fatiguées, des personnes qui veulent disparaître, qui veulent faire de leur colère une énergie renouvelable, à renouveler. Je voudrais user mon feu à faire du pain plutôt qu'à me consommer. / Mais tu peux pas faire un truc comme ça"

2. Amy Scholder, "Introduction," *The Essential Acker*, New York: Grove Press, 2002, p. xiii.

above the hair of my cunt.”¹ One cat bats at her head, the other punches at a copy of Marcuse’s *Five Lectures: Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Utopia*. The eye swivels inward. Kathy tries on diary, reorganizing other writings, typing, and then literally writing over the typing, re-transcribing conversation with work. I know that everyone’s into masturbation but have you already tried sleeping experiments? Before she’s thirty Kathy’s staying in bed 8 hours a day to write, when she’s not working. She starts mapping her dreams.

Dyke literature mourns and rages at the old stuff. It moves on to somewhere else with a sharp knife and a soundtrack. And yes it does march over the president’s face on its way there. At the height of her late twenties Kathy Acker makes this really creepy art piece with the Alan Sondheim. They’re experimenting with embodied writing so they decide to have actual sex while talking about writing, which seems to me like a bummed kind of decision, it’s too illustrative. But maybe they just really wanted to actually have sex and they also wanted to actually make an art piece but Kathy Acker wasn’t in town for very long, she was 26 and already borrowing money from her parents and maybe also RISD to be there, so they tried to save time by putting the two together. Kathy Acker writes to Alan Sondheim: *I think your work could profit from the intimate sexual (I mean this word in a general sense) concerns of my working.*² We watched the tape with my dyke, enby, and trans author’s collective and we agreed that it’s a failed experiment with sensation and the visual. Sometimes the medium swells around whatever else is happening and it just gulps down all intention. Dennis Cooper says “In the same way the most interesting contemporary art eschews traditional subject matter, concentrating instead on a supple manipulation of its components, pornography is not about that which it appears to observe, i.e. sex. It’s in fact intimate with human beings, its components, though not necessarily the stars of the movie one’s watching. They’re just the wardrobes sex has adorned for a certain outing. They, like clothes worn by fashion models, may be the focal point in each frame, but it is their motivating force – sexual drive – which injects value into such average bodies.”³ Unfortunately the Ackerness of Kathy Acker and the Sondheimness of Alan Sondheim are not mere garments through which sex’s mind-blowing eroticism is blasted, facilitating the viewer’s blissful escape into in their own private eroticism. I guess you could say that the pornographic contract fails and this failure is like a mouth full of ice water spit into the face, the actual heteronormative sex protocols are just so full of residue – visual scum, psychological scum – that we need to flush out. And talking about philosophy in front of the horror show that’s called normative romanticism just doesn’t do the trick.

1. Kathy Acker, *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*, in *Portrait of an Eye*, New York: Grove Press, 1998 (1973). Cf. *infra*, p. 348.

2. First letter to Alan Sondheim, February 21-23, 1974; cf. *infra*, p. 443.

3. Dennis Cooper, “Square One,” in *Writers Who Love Too Much*, ed. Dodie Bellamy and Kevin Killian, Brooklyn NY: Nightboat Books 2017.

Off camera we hear a voice, it's the Film Student who's been there the whole time, filming Kathy Acker and Alan Sondheim from a camera perched on an upside-down plastic salad bowl. She's citing Valerie Solanas, "I'm interested in the freewheeling arrogant females, who consider themselves fit to rule the universe, who have freewheeled to the limits of this 'society,' and are ready to wheel on to something far beyond what it has to offer." The Teacher goes out of the room to eat a sandwich. The Film Student puts her camera down. Once you're naked in front of a lot of other people you stop noticing nudity, kind of like how when you're actually having sex you forget why people care so much about sex. So it's easy for the Film Student and the Writer on the bed to start talking as if they're old friends. "I found a new lube this weekend," the Film Student begins. "All of my friends have been using straight organic aloe vera to fist. But my friend who used to clean at the Jackhammer in Chicago turned me on to this really thick, really greasy one." The Writer moves so that her head is now where her feet were. Her head is close to the left side of the film student. "I swear, you start to use it and whatever body is in front of you just falls open. Swallows you, up the elbow at least." The Writer, who is a power bottom, takes the Film Student's elbow into her hands. She moves her hands up and down the Film Student's forearm, masturbating it like a silicone cock. "Let me tell you about my practice," The Writer says in an interview, some other time.¹ "What I realize is that I am passive. Deeply, deeply passive. So the quality of making or creation that comes out in me – whatever it is that has to do with making – is based on a reactive rather than an active principle." The Film Student gets up off the bed and uses her foot to push the stack of Super8 film against the closed door. Someone is smoking on a balcony close by. Someone else is playing a saxophone, maybe in the room next door. "I don't see a blank page when I'm writing. Ever. Or when I do, nothing happens. I can't even write letters to people or apply for a grant. Literally, I just can't do it." The film student lubes her hand, up to the forearm, with the thick, greasy lube. "For me, the blank page is like an invitation to paralysis, not to creative activity." There's that second when you put your hand in and it catches on the thumb. But the body can always dilate more so you hold still and you wait and you listen and you fall right off the screen in the art museum auditorium and into this place where all writing is experimental and the protocol reads MOVE. Like in Laurie Weeks: *The infinitely transformative and playful properties of water as opposed to... A creative force much like an ongoing multiple girl orgasm, endlessly generative of possibility because... The liberation of consciousness from rigid and constricting hierarchies of... As exemplified by the eddies and swirls, the fall and shatter of water into emeralds the color of Jane's*² — it's four thousand years later and in one microsecond your hand is all the way in. Now spread your fingers.

In this book the transcript of the [Untitled Tape 1] marks a shift in Kathy Acker's

1. Larry McCaffery, interview with Kathy Acker, *Some Other Frequency: Interviews with Innovative American Authors*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, p. 28.

2. Laurie Weeks, *Zipper Mouth*, New York: The Feminist Press, 2011.

early practice. *If you were to abstract this from its original context would it dispossess the words of meaning or instead would it in function compositionally to continue the poet's avant-garde project of objective poetry within a quest named Finding true love when surrounded by shit and at the end of your doctoral funding.* Acker does the tape right when she's in her serial publication phase, after jumping from hyper lyric poetry experiments, to play with punctuation, spacing, and visual form, and finally on to longer prose pieces in which lived experience hitches to found and overheard testimony and gets injected into existing literary works. In the letters which form the base script for the tape (cf. *infra*), Acker is showing and playing with what was maybe going to become the fourth serial: *Breaking Through Memories into Desire or I become Jane Eyre who rebelled against everyone.* But then the tape happens and everyone says it was a disaster and you can see it in the transcript, the moment when the medium overwhelms everything and you get lost in the car crash of the scopophilic, embodied language becomes impossible because the body looms so large or especially the normed body which dissolves into the familiar roles of SHE sucks HIM off HE talks a lot about theory SHE talks about her dad and her desires HE is important and wants you to understand him SHE is touching herself and not speaking HE screams scarily when he comes SHE doesn't come at all. All of this thrown into high relief when you see the [Untitled Tape 2], transcript and description here, in which Acker and Sondheim attempt to flip the roles and end up doing mean-funny imitations of one another before getting upset and cutting the tape. Alan sitting against the wall whispers *I mean this is supposed to be a parody and this is not and I just don't know how to handle this shit anymore* and we understand that if Tape 2 is supposed to be the parody then that means Tape 1 is serious... Maybe in 1974 feminist visual criticism hasn't seeped into this particular NYC apartment so everyone's languishing in the last days before we have the language to express why everything feels so bad.

Do you remember the day we wanted to describe everything? Writes Lisa Robertson, in the book where she sets girls crawling like ants all over the Epic. We saw a euphoria of trees. This was the middle ground. Some women lounged on the clipped grass, shadows and intelligence moving lightly over their skin, compelled by the trenchant discussion of sovereignty.¹ The best part about Chris Kraus's 2000 article on [Untitled Tape 1] is when she says that instead of being just an embarrassing documentation of bad sex, it's the explosion of "Punk's New Narrative" against High Minimalism. But I want a different word, something other than Punk's New Narrative, *all my senses touch in topological space and you know that abstract consequence is based on a reciprocal relation between complex semantic construction between he and she* and I want to underline the masculinity of minimalism. Over vegan tacos a different Film Student says, "You know I used to call my work minimalist, but I stopped because, not being male and white, people just thought I wasn't

1. Lisa Robertson, *Debbie an Epic*, Vancouver: New Star Books, 1997.

working hard enough. Like, Oh I'm sure she's only attracted to that kind of practice in order to make up for some insufficiency in her formal training. Fuck minimalism. Now I'm all about Fem Excess." Pickled onions vomit out of our tacos like Ana Mendieta's *Siloueta 73*, the one where she makes a hole in the shape of her body and then fills it with fireworks that when lit grow and curl like crazed mushrooms.¹ Fem Excess is born. So Chris Kraus writes that as the viewer is watching Kathy Acker have sex with Alan Sondheim, the atoms colliding in their wake aren't actual bodies or lives but more the art movements that the bodiless names do or will come to represent. Fem Excess glows when High Minimalism says, "You're gonna kill people baby, you really are." Lisa Robertson again: *There was a plethora of trees*. Fem Excess sucks off High Minimalism and High Minimalism totally loses his shit. Maybe High Minimalism is losing a little of High Minimalism's austerity, maybe High Minimalism is rethinking that hermeticism because as you and I both know, a blended anal orgasm is something you want everyone to understand and experience, Fem Excess rubs its clit against the plush bedding and does what it does best to High Minimalism, which is EVERYTHING, there's no more time now for High Minimalism's coy remove, for High Minimalism's committed impenetrability, for the seriousness of High Minimalism's dense but polished musings *in the upper left corner improbable clouds grouped and regrouped the syntax of polit / esse: The feminist sky split open*.²

Dear Pierre Guyotat,

If literary history has taught me anything it's that a female voice has no authority, that *my voice* if I'm speaking in terms of literary tools has no authority. Clarice Lispector's tiny book *Água Viva* started as a huge autobiographical project named *Loud Object* that was hundreds of pages long. In the introduction to the new English translations this guy writes that in its long version, *Loud Object* was "at [times] as dull and uninspired as a housewife's neighborly chitchat." Because of course if you are a fem person writing long experimental text then it's always just, like, one word away from *femme au foyer*. This morning I was manically cleaning, you know how I hate to clean because it makes me feel gendered, but I hate disorganization so I was trying to get it over fast. I dropped a giant casserole dish on my coffee maker and smashed the carafe. It's ok though because everything important was written on Benzedrine. Yesterday I saw the filmmaker again. I met him a long time ago, at that weird dinner party we went to near The Marais. Who actually lives there? I was too tired to be fucked, I know that I

1. "In a grassy field, Mendieta mound an abstractly physical shape using hay and cut a trench running lengthwise along its vertical axis. She filled the trench with a combustible firework material. When the film opens, fire burns at the figure's head and begins to work its way along the trench, toward the base. As it progresses, the fireworks spew from within the recessed space like spilled entrails. The film lingers upon the smoking viscera for the remainder of the reel." Production note for 73, *Untitled, Silueta Series*, 1979, Iowa; in *Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015.

2. Lisa Robertson, *Debbie an Epic*, Vancouver: New Star Books, 1997.

definitely wouldn't come, so I fucked him first. Some people always want to fuck first, because they want to be fucked later and they want to *come* last. I fucked him for an hour, first with the pink dildo, longer, then with the black one. He showed me how to hold my hand so that I could slap his face better. Slap then caress. With your hand a little open. Caress after, because intensity is all about variety. Clarice Lispector turned *Loud Object* into *Água Viva* by a process that she called "drying out": she removed almost every autobiographical "I." But there are a few that outlasted the cut and I like to imagine that this is what *Loud Object* would have read like: *There had never been so many paths. We spoke little, you and I. I didn't know why the whole world was so annoyed and electronically able. But able to what? The body heavy with sleep. And our big eyes inexpressive as the wide-open eyes of a blind man. On the terrace the fish was in an aquarium and we drank juice in that hotel bar overlooking the landscape. With the wind came the dream of goats: at the next table a solitary faun. We looked at our glasses of ice-cold juice and dreamed statically inside the transparent glass. 'What did you say?' you were asking. 'I didn't say anything.' Days and more days passed and everything in that danger and the geraniums so scarlet.* It was hard to get the aim right, don't forget to caress especially before you slap, but then I slapped him too low, too close to the jaw line, and made a stupid joke about not being very athletic. Too close to the jaw is better than too close to the nose but still I don't think he enjoyed it very much. I'm better at other things. She told me about geraniums so scarlet that they cut all narrative and I keep thinking about her whenever I fuck him. I want it all electric, but when you start to sleep with someone for a long time habit turns solid around the same acts. I was too tired to dream up any scenario, sometimes planning good sex feels like a full-time job and I'm already giving four seminars this semester on sovereignty and border walls. I need someone else to help me, I need to learn something new. Although I did learn from him how to put four fingers into his cunt and then to punch his cunt with my hand, if you need some variety twist your hand so that he feels your knuckles. "I think you're into emotional sex," he said to me. It's true that intensity seems somehow *more intense* if it has an emotional component. But then again she's a Pisces. This political theorist she dated would always stare at her so intensely when they were fucking, like it was the most serious thing that they could be doing. It felt like they were crossing into something. She was scared of the ritual. Superstitiously she wondered, Were we making something that can't be unmade after? "You fucked me for an hour," the filmmaker said, "You destroyed my pussy." "What did you say?" He said, "I'll be feeling this for days and thinking of you." Through the window the neighbor's geraniums are scarlet and I think I finally got the slap right. I still need to get a new carafe for the coffee maker but in the meantime I've been drinking instant coffee and I actually like it.

A HALF HOUR LATER
AFTER THE FEMINIST SPLIT
EVERYONE IS GETTING ANOTHER TATTOO AND/OR HAVING SEX WITH
HIR TATTOOIST

Dyke writing both performs protocols of narrative revolt informed by the collective condition of emerging out of some common historical cesspool and into a multivalent, groovy subjectivity, AND it has to take into account to our total and forever lack of grouped dyke essence. Dyke writing might be a practice that follows a motivation but each motivation is oriented ever so slightly in space, in experience, in feeling. Last week I went to a spin class with Caroline Bergvall and as the instructor shouted out NAME YOUR DEMONS! RIDE DOWN YOUR DEMONS! and as the black lights flashed over our glowing teeth Caroline brought up Kathy Acker. She said, "One is not one self. One has not one self." The instructor signals us to do riding squats and everyone in the room hoists themselves up off the bike seats and down again in unison, a field of wack-a-moles in the crouched position just before the mallet drops or a page full of end stops that gives onto a flurry of verbs, "One's speech is that of others. Intrinsic separation and alienation are offset by processes of accumulation and collation, performative masking and unmasking." One of Kathy Acker's great technological innovations in writing, which we get to see here in its development as she goes through experiment after experiment, is, *How to speak without a voice? How to refuse "becoming somebody"?* It's Friday at 7pm WAY after the official French work day ends and that guy who just got his PhD in Virtual Literatures funded by the prestigious new institutional annex is sitting on my couch with a glass of sparkling artisanal lemonade. We've been co-organizing a seminar on temporality and the contemporary. Spoiler alert: contemporaneity has to do with jostling for the privilege to name the shape that temporality most resembles NOW. Time-space is a cluster! No, it's a marbled cake! No, it's *really* layers of minerals that in their proximity challenge geontology! I'm tired of talking and I want everyone OUT so that I can relax with my anthology of poet's theatre but we seem, as a group, to have hit a conceptual twist. So I try to pull everyone toward a compromise. "I think that what we're all basically saying..." I empty the ashtray and carcinogens detach microscopic drift and settle, waft around the back of my bookshelf to find posterity in that place that I never vacuum. "I mean I think that we can agree that we're all struggling to describe feeling after identity. Like, I know that I'm historically constituted residue, with my own codes for agency, resistance, and submission – but I still feel so real! How do we describe that?" The Scholar of Virtual Literature: "No, that's not at all what I've been talking about. I *know* that I'm real. I totally have an essence. We all do. I think that essence needs to be reinstituted as an analytical tool, and not in that feminist new materialism way—more, like: why can't we just get back to Plato? and I *really* disagree with your use of the word ontology." The artist who just finished his PhD-in-practice jumps in: "I do feel like social categories probably have some social weight that we shouldn't, just, throw out like the bathwater. My thesis show is about finding meaning in white space that doesn't just seem blank, but is *actually* blank. Minimalism, like nostalgia, is comforting and I just keep thinking that if it feels so right it can't be wrong." I get another beer because this is going to be a long night. Have you read Testo Junkie? I got it when I was still working in unpaid feminist internships in America.

At the time, I had used my intern key to let myself into the office of the famous Editorial Director, off on vacation, and had stolen the Preciado book off the desk. It was in French so it just seemed so romantic. There's a quote I love that goes "I write about what matters most to me, in a language that doesn't belong to me. This is what Derrida called the monolingualism of the other. None of the languages that I am speaking belong to me, and yet there is no other way to speak, no other way to love. None of the sexes that I embody possess any ontological density, and yet there is no other way of being a body. Dispossessed from the start."¹ Even though we have our astrological charts to detail the potential of our personalities and the angles of our desires, isn't cheerful dispossession the main sign under which we've all been born? Fem Excess raises her glass in assent.

So how do we speak, and say something bold and new and weird, without presuming to summon our dead ontological density? Kathy Acker does it through what she calls piracy, which is another way of saying movement. Who knows what other figures would have come or will come after the pirate? The synthetic hormone, the silicon crystal, the algorithm, falling in love with how someone dances on Fortnite. Any space contains the architectures of whatever was there before and was built on or around the older stuff. Once I read a different Kathy Acker essay alongside a poem by Fallon Mayanja, in a park on the bottom southeast corner of Paris. The park is huge and, notoriously, has a nude beach and a queer cruising spot. Walking around and looking at the empty forest, the curator informs us that in this one mile radius of park ground are: 1/ the erased foundations of the experimental university built after '68, 2/ the rundown pavilions still standing from the 1889 Paris world fair, and 3/ a contemporary dance venue currently housed in buildings that were used by the French police for interrogations during the Algerian war. It's the blankness, I think while I'm staring at the photos of the Artist-slash-PhD's thesis show, that isn't real. "I don't know," I put on my girl voice, the one I use to diffuse tension. "I'm pretty sure we *shouldn't* be returning to Heidegger."

Acker writes at the end of *My Mother: Demonology*: "Above me, the roll of toilet paper was covered with specks of black hairs... It was a reflection of my face before the creation of the world."² When I was still fucking straight cis men I would entrap them by going to cafés with a copy of *Infinite Jest*. Then I'd wait for my targets to fall into the trap. It worked every time. "Oh," they would say, "I see that you're reading David Foster Wallace." I'd smile and say nothing because the email generated by the OKCupid algorithm informed me that women who responded to messages from men in 400 characters or less had a 69% higher chance of getting to the actual encounter irl. The target continues: "I never did actually finish it, but, man, that guy's such a genius: I mean, writing a book that's *that long*." Acker shows us how authorial originality finds meaning swinging between the rusty poles of

1. Paul B. Preciado, *Teño Junkie: Sexe, drogue et biopolitique*, Paris: Grasset, 2008.

2. Kathy Acker, *My Mother: Demonology*, New York: Grove, 1994.

sexual difference and that getting out entirely means refusing to claim a position of creativity from which originality can be generated. By redefining creativity not as genius but as protocol. The insignificant and the meaningless is where this protocol starts. In the breakdown of muscle that is a tear that actually builds something. “In my search for myself, I found nothing.” So eat something. Of course it’s hard to get anything down I’m allergic to almost all the available choices so I do eat but I throw up. Then I marvel at my own vomit: if I turn my head a little bit that way, it looks like Hegel – or wait! – John Cage. Whatever. The desire to gag builds in the space historically defined as the authorial “nobody,” the female invocation to “be somebody” (without hearing, like Simone de Beauvoir would have wanted it, “be everything” or “be universal” which basically means “be like him”). Feeling light-headed, Valerie takes a Xanax and gets into bed with her copy of Harryette Mullen’s S*PERM**K*T. What does a girl like me dream of? In the mid-70s Acker was already into masturbation, maybe because she was reading Pierre Guyotat and trying to invent her own version of his protocols. When she comes it’s by putting her hot computer charger against her inner thigh. She’s pretending that Ron Silliman is here and—oops—he just spilled his hot, very hot, green tea into her lap. Here! He leaps for a dishtowel, pushing the cats Paul and Lizzie aside, and presses it against Kathy’s crotch. The hot tea creeps closer. When she comes the rush of sensation goes straight from cunt to telomeres. They say that astronauts who spend extended amounts of time in zero-gravity environments experience a slowing of biological time that when analyzed in samples sent down to earth, manifests in extended telomeres. Freed from the obligation of gravity our DNA just gets so... big! Physicists believe and medical professionals concur that longer life starts with longer telomeres. They give your DNA something to snack on in times of stress. But when the astronauts come back into the typical Earth human gravitational pull, THUMP, the enhanced telomeres immediately start to shrivel. After a few days back on Earth they’re actually shorter than before. For the time being science is stuck with: it IS possible to prolong life – Valerie Solanas was of course right – but only if you get out and stay out. In a 1975 letter, Kathy Acker writes to Ron Silliman: *By the way, how do I “experience language directly?” I’ll be damned if I can ever separate language from my use of it from my perceiving/desires...*¹

I never wanted to be famous, Valerie Solanas says. What I wanted was to publish exactly in my terms, and to get paid for it. I wanted my life to become material that wasn’t thrown out like trash but that was kept somewhere, given to somebody, written and archived and rewritten in highly technical literary projects that are masquerading as girly diaries. I want to be like an orgasm so strong that it wipes out literature. Since the day when the lesbian peoples renounced the idea that it was absolutely necessary to die, no one has. The whole process of death has ceased

1. Letter from Kathy Acker to Rob Silliman, cited in Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Cambridge: Semiotext(e), 2017.

to be a custom,¹ Monique Wittig says to Sande Zeig on an Untitled Tape 3. Part of getting to be a myth is drilling down so deep into the structure that it actually mutates to accommodate you. The body shifts with each rep. Acker says in the Burning Bombing of America, a dyked-out version of Pierre Guyotat that was written alongside many of the texts in this volume: FUR FLIES OUT TO THE EDGES OF THE UNIVERSE WE FALL OFF THE EDGE GOLD SPLENDOR WHERE GOLD IS CONSTANT NO MARK OF IMPERIALISM GHOSTS SAY THEY OWN ME BODY*HEART*MIND ESCAPE BURNING HEART-SUN LONG FIRE ESCAPE DESCEND INTO THE EARTH EAT THE REST OF MY HEART and when I read it I'm thinking of that moment when the thumb catches and it fucking hurts but I want to stay in you long enough to change something the best bodybuilders visualize the targeted muscle breaking down then filling with blue light. At the end of the book, in her writing on a flyer in 1976, Kathy Acker shoots for immortality in excessive orgasm and it's so convincing that no one even thinks to look where High Minimalism went, "When it was finally over, I passed out. I can't even remember what he felt, if he came with me or if he came at all."²

APPENDICE C.U.N.T. (TEACHING SHEET)

A NOTE ON REPRESENTATION AND SPECTACLE FEATURING NO REAL SOLUTION

*"Language. How do I, fucked, use the language? I don't want to be doing this writing."*³

1. I've seen the Untitled Tape 1 a bunch of times but still when I saw the photos in the middle of this book, especially the ones that are the straight-shot of A's fingers failing to make the right contact on K's clit, I have to say that my lungs compressed and I felt suddenly so breathless. Something about Kathy Acker being dead so it feels like a major invasion of privacy. The rule about the Untitled Tape 1 according to the emails from A. is that it won't be shown unless they're both there, and have both consented to its screening. The dead can't consent, or at least not verbally. But what forms of consent are waived or are not waived by dying? I overheard someone saying the Untitled Tape 1 was great because we have so little moving footage of Kathy Acker, it gives us a flash of her charisma. Can genitals be charismatic?

2. It's kind of like a visual version of reading someone's secret therapy notebook, the kind full of magical thinking and all the things they're supposed to report back to their therapist next session. Or is that just my internalized misogyny? To think

1. Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig, *Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary*, New York: Avon Books, 1979.

2. Kathy Acker and Alan Sondheim, [Flyer for the Whitney Museum], 1976, cf. *infra*.

3. Kathy Acker, from *Breaking Through Memories into Desire Part III*, cf. *infra*, p. 381.

that cunts should be private. One of my favorite literary gossips around Kathy Acker is in that Dodie Bellamy piece and she channels Kathy Acker's voice.¹ Kathy Acker is saying that she got her vulva pierced and ever since she's coming all the time nonstop even when she's just walking or teaching or shopping for oat milk. Have you ever ridden a motorcycle with your vulva pierced? Everyone should try it.

3. All this talk talk talk. "Writing can be sensation," whatever. But get a genital piercing and it will really take it all home. *As repetition crumbles logic the meaning slips through vibrating up against the thickness of the semicolon accentuated by breath-stop at the end of the sentence that you have to circumvent – imagine riding down the stuttered sentences of ENTRY INTO DWELLING IN PARADISE your hands pulsing at the clutch with each new wave I bet you didn't know you could come that long or that hard now THAT's a literary experience for you.* When she saw the tape for the first time it was that shot that got to her *Speaking as a woman I mean a subject emerging from a history of shit* she realized that what she REALLY liked was the fantasy cunt, the ghost cunt, the cunt-from-beyond.

4. THIS cunt is that cunt that hits exactly the subversive transformational sweet spot of literature and takes over the entire world – we see THIS cunt wearing platform sneakers and stomping, on labia lengthened into strong fleshy legs a little sticky to the touch, among long tall buildings that THIS cunt smashes down or sucks up pulls up like popsicle sticks to rearrange into architecture for the Immortal. Something about the other cunt pressed in 2D black-and-white print really reduces us to the historical bummer of it all.

5. We were talking in a panel in front of strangers about how queers are into Acker but really she took up too much space in England anyway, she was rich, how does a popular movement get into someone who didn't come from the same popular background? And the scholars all decided that it had something to do with performativity, with learning from these texts how to perform. Once you stop performing instead of just writing your income jumps 500%, suddenly everyone wants a little of your body and that's one thing that you can't just scan and email. That's something that you can't just print and disseminate like a still from an old film that you made when you were in your twenties. That cunt-still feels like it cuts out all performative potential. Aka, it's harder to project against something you can see.

6. Performance, while being material, hinges on the capacity to summon in a public space the immaterial power of fantasy. Known sometimes as "charisma." Or "collective experience." You depend on the performer to transform the text into experience, in a way that you just can't do alone.

7. But preceding the performer with a photo of her genitals cuts into her capacity to use this same body to generate collective experience. Close-ups of cunts

1. Dodie Bellamy, "Digging Through Kathy Acker's Stuff," in *When the Sick Rule the World*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2015.

reduce the female person to a flat page from which it is difficult to do the 3- or 4-D work of creating experience. I hate this cunt picture.

8. In France, she is told that people who grew up in America are oppressively optimistic but if she's looking at the whole thing optimistically, maybe the bright side is that: this vulva gets to travel. There's that one line from My Mother Demonology: *Let your cunt come outside your body and crawl, like a snail, along the flesh. Slither down your legs until there are trails of blood over the skin. Blood has this unmistakable smell. Then the cunt will travel, a sailor, to foreign lands. Will rub itself like a dog, smell, and be fucked.* But the sinking sensation that this cunt here is not traveling on its own terms but is instead being used to throw historical subjection back onto the iconic because afab people should know that their place is like Alan Sondheim says in the [Untitled Tape 1]: *the image is part of Kathy everything of that image is part of Kathy and Kathy's work I don't want you to pay any attention I want you to look to the left of the monitor... she is drawing power away from me I've got to take it back I've got to convince you that the important thing is to pay attention to the world to pay attention to the external world.*¹

9. A famous if controversial conceptual poet who came to her creative writing program in Paris came *all the way from America* before spewing all kinds of bullshit: THE INTERNET, he kept saying, IS TO WRITERS WHAT THE CAMERA WAS TO PAINTERS. She scribbles in her notes: Don't you think that it's more a question of *dispositif*? Like the camera made realism attainable and so rendered certain manual techniques and uses of painting obsolete. I think he means that "text generators" are to writing what the camera was to painting – not the Internet just like, in general. "You know what I mean," the Famous Conceptual Poet says. then he says, "But if you MUST criticize me that's ok I'm pretty comfortable with it really I've already made my innovation I've really changed the scenery I'm ready to retire look now at this phase in my career I'm invited to lecture in Paris."

10. The Conceptual Poet says, "My work did something that no one had ever done before" and this time Valerie stop texting her friends in the class about how much she hates him and instead actually speaks: "But it seems like Kathy Acker already did that but way before, like in the 80s."

11. The Conceptual Poet says "Yeah but her work was so timid, don't you think?"

12. She does not think that the 80s Acker is timid but she does feel like maybe this is the effect of the posthumous cunt photo. It's like a pre-transition photo, before Kathy Acker became F-T-Icon.

13. I prefer the cunt that is a motivation and not meat; I'm not sure that THIS cunt can actually ever be photographed. "It's hypothetical," Valerie Solanas says to an interviewer. "No, hypothetical is the wrong word. It's just a literary device. There's no organization called SCUM..." [The Interviewer]: "It's just you." Valerie: "it's not even me... I mean, I thought of it as a state of mind."

1. Kathy Acker and Alan Sondheim, [Untitled Tape 1], cf. *infra*, p. 489.

The Golden Woman

kathy acker

(ca. 1969-1970)

THE GOLDEN WOMAN

the imagination doesn't change anything.

what are we interested in

Today we finally broke with our parents

the parents all over America

taking amphetamine

watching T.V. five to ten hours a day

drinking two to ten martinis between 5:30 and 10:30 P.M.

getting undressed in the dark

getting up on weekdays between 7:00 and 7:30

falling asleep at 10:30 in front of the television

getting undressed in the dark

going out to a Chinese restaurant run by a Jew from Long
Island

going to a French restaurant and eating Chateaubriand

playing canasta the men playing gin rummy playing bridge
with the girls

~~playing games to get money for a charity~~

worrying about what to wear to a semi-formal affair

getting drunk

worrying about last month's phone bill

not wearing suspenders or zoot suits garters different

colored socks orange and purple socks no socks at all

not wearing sexy shoes

not wearing black to the funeral of a friend's mother

criticising another women who didn't wear black to the
funeral of the friend's mother

getting a new television

Ode to Beautiful Women #2

[3]

for Andy Wright

exciting beautiful women
making beautiful women dresses by Fortuny
beautiful women discussing literature using the word
“edifying”
beautiful women maintaining their composure and the
composure of others during a disquieting event
beautiful women entering a room
beautiful women with glasses in their hands one filled
with Grand Marnier another with Creme de Noyaux
beautiful women wearing clothes too heavy for their
bodies
beautiful women reentering our lives

I want to fuck you
in a bed
at night
hold my legs open while you move into around in
me
I want to be alone with you
I'm sick of shit I don't want you once a week
I want to eat with you
work/ while you're working
I want
to be with you
David's giving a reading
anybody's (friends') giving a reading
what sort of communism is this I want you
I'm sick of you wearing clothes sitting around in your
office/ your house pretending I don't know you
I'm sick of thinking about you and you're not here
I'm sick of knowing it's impossible
knowing that this is not our poem it's the poem of an
old cliché when beautiful women returning through
our desire

The text reproduced here is a 4-page typescript, archived at the New York University's Fales Library & Special Collections, Kathy Acker Notebooks, Mss 434 – Box 5 – Folder 2. Pages are unnumbered.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to our pagination.

The date of this text is difficult to confirm. Because it mentions David [...] giving a reading¹ we can guess that it was written in San Diego where David Antin was teaching at UCSD.² Acker studied in San Diego while living with Bob Acker (and a bit after their separation) from 1966 to 1970, then again from 1972 to 1973. As these poems are very different in style from those Acker wrote between the spring and the fall of 1972, and as there are few traces of the themes and approach that characterize the 1972-1973 writing, we assume that they were created prior to May 1970 (when Neufeld and Acker moved to New York City). If the last poem alludes to Neufeld, that would date the whole set from 1969-1970, as Leonard and Kathy met in the fall of 1969. Like Neufeld told to Kraus, Acker "was writing poetry, although she hadn't published anything yet".³ Very few texts written prior to 1970 still exist, at least this is what Acker wrote to Alan Sondheim in early March 1974: (most of the early stuff (from before 4 5 years ago) I've thrown out.⁴ So far, it's the earliest Acker typescript the editor knows of.

Notes:

31 Ode to Beautiful Women #1 So exciting! These early poetry experiments give us one of the best senses, in terms of the texts in this collection, of how much Acker tried different things, how quickly she tried on and rejected styles and protocols. But these early poems also show themes that are stable across Acker's production, regardless of the protocol choices: play with form, ambivalent disgust with Mommy and Daddy figures, a desire to indicate the relation between neo-liberalism (well, the version that she was seeing then, in the mid-60s) and expression. In Chris Kraus's essay on the tape that Acker will do with Sondheim (cf. *infra*: [Untitled Tape 1]), Kraus writes that Acker will go on to invent the genre that she needs to work within: "a kind of emotional formalism."⁵ In these early poems we've got the formalism struggling with the emotion (the play on the ode throughout all three pieces). Or maybe sometimes we get the emotion fighting against its form (text #1 – full of yearning action getting [...] going [...] wearing [...] not wearing [...] worrying [...] getting [...] but diffused through that sparse free-form). Emotion and form haven't fused together yet to create what will become, later, the repeated core of Acker's diverse writing practices. Instead we get these poems that you can

1. It also mentions "Andy Wright" who could be Andrew Wright, Professor Emeritus of English literature at UCSD in 1963-1991.

2. He and Eleanor Antin had moved from New York to San Diego in June 1968 (cf. Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 45).

3. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

4. Second letter to Alan Sondheim, February 24-28, 1974, cf. *infra*, p. 445.

5. Chris Kraus, "Sex, Truths, and Videotape," *FEED*, 2000.

imagine being funny if they're read out loud to an audience, because they're riffing on form. But they aren't so powerful yet... [CF]

33 Ode to Beautiful Women #3 ...at least not until we get to the beginning of the last one, where the "I" smashes in, barreling past the "we" and the "they" that comes before it: **I want to fuck you.** Whenever Acker writes with the I it starts shooing off energy, because it's in the literary "I" that she's able to think, complicate, and play all those games with address that exceed parody or imitation. Instead of autobiography, the "I" mutates into a weird, open field. If we follow the "I" through this early work, we follow what Acker describes in a 1995 Penn Sound recording as her major preoccupation in her early experiments: "the problematic of identity."¹

But as for trademark Acker content that's already here. There are echoes of the very first section of Acker's 1978 book *Blood & Guts in High School*, a process which starts with, "Parents stink." We begin, like always, with the emancipation that happens by leaving your parents and their version of education (the family, required school). We set out for new structures, which for Acker almost always happens through sex. Carla Harryman writes about sex in Acker as an emancipatory education, one that is anti-institutional, so hopeful for fem and female punks everywhere. Here, Harryman's writing about Acker's 1993 book *My Mother: Demonology*:

"When Laure, our narrator, a French diarist, Bataille's mistress, Acker, etc., sorts out the problem of elitism and education, she enters wonder via the anteroom of education, dancing school, or her own body; where she becomes sexually aroused for the first time. This second kind of education is amoral rather than corrupt [...] When the edifice of institutionality dissolves, wonder occurs."²

We can follow this wonder from the early poems all the way through to the end, watching how Acker builds her emotional formalism through the kind of pleasure and desire that can't be taught at home or in school but has to be physically practiced. [CF]

1. Kathy Acker and Charles Bernstein, "Interview and Reading at SUNY-Buffalo as part of the Wednesdays @ 4 Plus Series, April 12, 1995," Penn Sound Kathy Acker archive, <www.writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Acker.php> [accessed 25 July 2019].

2. Carla Harryman, "Acker Unformed," *Lust for Life: On the Writings of Kathy Acker*, New York: Verso, 2006, p. 38.

Section from DIARY

kathy acker

(1-2 / 1971)

haven't been able to write for the past many weeks because I've been going crazy gradual and insidious loss of memory this was trying and stopped unsuccessfully to restore last night though before knowing I'd do anything to maintain at least one source of love the candle scrapings on the wood in our livingroom I'd done it almost given up myself I was no longer able to the cats swarm around me remember within the second my feeling my reaction when Lenny fucked Susanna hid from me even though he was telling me that he was going through a conversion, had not loved me but would be able to love me when talking to Jerry and Diane the past week I noticed I forgot names was unable to come unable to decide whether I was hot with Lenny etc. etc. I finally felt myself rapidly shutting into a small space not able to leave I knew that was the disaster talked to myself for days aloud so that I wouldn't forget from minute to minute the train of my thought went slowly repeating each phrase three or four times so that I mustn't lose track tonight told Lenny to go to Charlie's party after a series of bad cramps preferring the quiet wanting to speak only non-theoretically it probably wouldn't be possible I repeated each phrase finally getting to the area the beginning of the area? I had closed off for months pretending I wanted to sleep with lots of people I was a lesbian I thought Lenny should today in the afternoon I think of how I consistently in the presence of other people think that I want them to love me act so that they'll notice me so impose upon them I shouldn't do this therefore I carefully milkwash myself between the inside and the outside I try to be bland not to be crazy watch

I don't show I need other people I practically killed myself doing this I hung on to the areas once hitting it squarely I was able to feel cry I showed Lenny I hated him for hours living with me trying to live with someone else denying me love unless I got rid of myself I spat at him screamed at him drooled I saw out of my own eyes I prefer to live alone each second beyond open even today the Lizard comes back chortling leaves I notice myself forgetting each time have to follow it back careful not to let it go

[4] Lenny leaves good I spend two hours masturbating but books no longer excite me only licking my own nipple. the way Paul falls asleep I promise myself to act as I feel like the fuck with who I'm with for the last 6 months at times scared I'm dying won't mention it fuck others today I have cramps again probably should see the doctor but so little money lately I prefer to amuse myself when it ha ha magically appears the goddamn sex show the boss actually the sub-boss Bob growing more evil Kali tells me that as she was dancing then pretending to use a dildo Bob was in the back saying come on come on more get that cunt up there come on get it into it sweating trembling Josie said Bob told her to cut out the talking and get on with the fuck Bob tells me when I call him about the dancing job he's got a new sign out front baby pink I kiss the Lizard "Live Sex" it's the only show in New York that has it that should get them in they now time our show god forbid we stop a minute earlier signs all over the projection room saying that Bob is pissed off blah blah talking to others in the show two days ago helps a group of freaks instead of isolated freaks we can all go to heaven together one of the guys is gay which also helps they (Bob and the other shit horrors) start a 12:30 show don't want to pay extra we're expected to work a 14 hour day no union for angels the projectionists get \$2.50 an hour

as opposed to the union rate for dirty movies \$8. per hour and there's the damn depression whatever's literally true the reality I have to show my cunt I have to stay alive I could get too crazy to know when to kill myself the bosses decide they're not making enough profit so the extra shows Kali's sex so on I think now that I sold out to work in the show it might have been better to get a shitty 8-hour-a-day robot specialty who knows I'd probably still do the same since money has the same fucking attraction given this society I don't know how else to keep myself going for all that Lenny and I have said in the last three days the future the imagination I don't know if we'll stick two new people now unwilling to kill each other the prime requirement for love here we've lost track of everything we face the blank page and have no life to put down no one knows why we write because for centuries we've been lost a maze of academic shits all words but those concerning money no longer have value what tracks we have to find repeat follow back into the Old days these angels descend my ears these hearts of our sex ~~someone knowing this~~ practiced at denying all of experience but the constant rent bill gas bill phone bill amusement source of color light quick change more pot to forget we've forgotten the ancient person hermaprodite homosexual the cats bite each other on the balls eyes my hand goes between their legs Lenny comes in and asks if he'll bother me if he sits and eats cheese beside me I love him the cramps start again and I'm scared this is all literally true like the use of taboo objects anything to trace through the memory our writing is a religious act and has no other uses

[5]

[6] really too tired to write four five hours of work scared every minute the cops were going to bust and having to decide between the \$20. per show and the cops also if we got arrested wouldn't be able to work and get paid tomorrow Sunday which is what we live on Lenny confused by me and not knowing what to do so we don't talk to one another also Susanna dancing trying this time to make me not Lenny I wasn't able to speak to her scared to show her feeling we had dinner with Mark and his lover Mickey Mark blabbing about how he hated women one man told Lenny I had a bad shape I half heard turned round he saw me and fled I was telling Mark well I'm not a woman I try to follow that thought to what extent imaginary? I've turned myself inside out if I was a woman delicate pretty mainly going to be taken care of, wasn't. so that wasn't what I want, despised those cunts also the direct hatred of people who goo all over me and then shit on me behind my back feel like those are mainly cunts males more direct this is probably a childhood fantasy it comes up all the time with Lenny I ask him to love me meaning I want him to take care of me I don't know what that statement ~~means~~ more feeling means I have no idea why it recurs which it does often so that I get angry at Lenny because he won't listen to me and I feel like I'm not showing what I want every time he tries to help me do something even take over my decisions I am completely pissed like today he decided we shouldn't do the third show when the cops were most likely to bust I threw a fit I'm always broke I want the \$20. simultaneously pissed off at him because I'm doing the show I tell the guy at the record store getting Lenny a present? no one's bought me presents since I was ten an obvious lousy lie but I think at the same time it's true I'm ugly I'm not ugly if I dress eccentricly enough it won't be a problem this is how I stay

in touch with myself (hopefully) putting it down to go back to and to not go away from Mark's boy friend Mickey is very pretty doesn't talk lets Mark have all the attention plays dumb smiles a lot probably isn't so dumb but I'm sort of lost don't know their conventions so we all feel slightly strained not bad I can't trace my sex the ways I'm fucked up it would be good to try for a while to put down what I know now a hanging on desire not to have to keep fighting keep being rigid I eat a biscuit now I won't let anyone do anything for me this seems to me to have lasted a long time I desperately want presents throw it into the show by talking about how I got fucked up because Santa Claus screwed me can't like the presents I get then feel guilty I don't like the present get angry at Lenny for making me feel guilty at him this time Lenny won't give me any presents I think that he doesn't do anything for me he says maybe i should get a lousy job so we can quit the show I know he'll ruin himself if he does like everyone else brain-washed he has to pay \$100. a month child support \$20. a month divorce lawyer I eat another biscuit a political Janis Joplin song playing this is our religion if we can somehow keep trying to find sanity back to the sex do I want to screw another woman meaning I'm a female? Lenny says I've got a cunt I do lately he's been saying I'm beautiful but he's been acting goo-goo slightly unreal O everything is beautiful money is evil just look at your body and you'll see how beautiful you are I look I see me I don't know if it's beautiful dull it doesn't at that point seem like me I don't get as upset as I used to Elizabeth just knocked over the record player a red Azuma vase Lenny's going to beat the shit out of her i get scared angry at him which is ridiculous I probably hate my body sex? in spite or due to all the slap on the back I'm a man attitudes I have Josie says the same she's absolutely babt looks like

[7]

a fourteen year old groupie which is who she is just fucked Jack Cassidy some member of the Jefferson Airplane we have a real star in our midst O here comes Nico Mark says he also has a fantasy about someone seeing him in a play and giving him a good role mine's about Warhol though I also think that everyone hates me thinks I'm hideous with my short hair and draggy breasts I'm

[8] really not commonly pretty or affable whatever I am we're really a bunch Kali a junkie Mark as crazy as me Lenny convinced everyone's beautiful if it was known Josie's attention span lasts for two minutes in the middle of the show she leaps off the stage she forgot to wear underpants and has to put them on so that she can take them off again no one including Mark knows what's happening they pretend they're not suppose to pay us tonight which was adorable I'm paranoid enough with the cops we might miss our pay tomorrow stuck in jail I maniacally spend everything presents to keep us me going I don't think Lenny needs them I never save a cent I then sit and brood we have no money imagine what else I want a mania about glittering objects lately crosses the damn music around Nico's music is driving me crazy three lousy endings I might as well listen to her

days and days of anxiety each day I hear only accounts of the collapse of the city through breaking pipes graft viciousness unlike animals cats inventing more intricate joys the Welfare hotels have no heat rats no water \$400.00 charged per two dingy rooms for three weeks I haven't been able to write going through some crisis as yet unknown grasping on only to the homosexuality I paste fake jewels onto clothes hours of handsewing a desperate attempt to align myself another Black Panther slaying? certain death penalty Lenny and I argue about money food couldn't cost as much as it does angels wait like vultures above my head waiting for me to flip out getting nearer and nearer the pressure the fight against all deaths increases no friends to show any way Ariadne's thread Christian's path Medusa's death I can sleep 16 hours a day after a while the distinction between waking and sleeping consciousness disappeared a semi-controllable continuum in which animals and men resembled one another Acker writes me that he hates me and that I should help him to stop hating me I can't reply the faked states I throw myself into glammers that don't exist and hopes of outlets that exist only in my mind not this, but otherwise an insane world of human connexions even Jerry involved in Indian translation denies animal-human desire Paul the last two weeks constantly sucks his own nipples his two front paws clench and unclench allowing his claws to extend retreat the skin of the stomach where he sucks grows pink seems hairless like exzema the few times he's gone for Elizabeth's nipple she's gotten up disappeared I don't know what I'm going to do at least 50 more years having to get food everyday of every twelve months of those years ~~not be bored II find surprisingly~~ ~~that~~ I sympathize with Emma if she had only succeeded in her desire discovering that treasure which has to be outside human

experience again the metaphors angel and animal anything to cite
what is necessary to fight out obvious death humans desiring to
destroy themselves by acting and thinking like robots great big
Arg-men stuffing their mouths with rotten cod liver oil oil mag-
gots of cat shit I shave all the hair off my head as Lenny says
[10] use to hope but not very well pretend I was very tough and male
so that I could escape from my parents the 57th street prison de-
nying all my desire only the dog masturbated and licked up toilet
water I find myself still there in a fake light green room I hate
and can't put up any pictures or photographs my mother won't
change red flowered curtains and beds too narrow for a body that
quickly converted into couches with huge bolsters to hide them
beyond that place down the closed street the park I used to play in
through the bars I could come to watch the river in dreams even
now I find steps down the high stone through the bars go down
to either a small bit of earth or some rocks swim across part of the
river until there's a path on the other side partly dry there go out
farther the beginning of a great joy I don't remember if I return or
not in the late autumn I used to stand there when it was cold and
damp and no one else could bother me I would see myself as alone
the more I liked it the stronger I would try to stay there as long as
possible hopefully even to the point of getting sick across the way
the Rockefellers had a house and enclosed
park I would try to get in but wasn't able to

Jerry leaving tomorrow 5:30 A.M. if they Jerry and Diane are able [11]
to I've begun this again having trouble writing a lapse of two
days from the last section I don't know how to put down my
feelings about Jerry very upset since I speak to few people none
as fully as him though that's not fully at the point ~~point~~ when I
could go closer to someone I feel abstracted scared? I feel like I've
been to bed with Jerry it's stupid to pretend that's fantasy because
it's literal truth (though not now) while the dinner was getting
cold Diane not yet up Jerry and Matthew were Lenny's speaking
to Martha his ex-wife she's in town with his kid for some big
meeting she's an editor I imagine that she'll come here going
through my clothes my stuff throwing everything around I'll feel
left out again try to reassure myself by saying well you've done
this and this it's a fucking lie except for the writing I've registered
at F.I.T. and scared shit about that I'm sure some business bitch
will crack me over the head you'll never get a job you little twirp
you should have never left Brandeis the crazy bin you can't make
it in this world a job to me means adjustment the acceptance
into the real reality I'm one of the un-fits get desperate about get-
ting a job I tell Lenny I'll go to agencies tomorrow he says what
the fuck except he wouldn't say fuck that's my jargon wanting to
identify with some group I've got the smut show I don't so much
care about doing that actually good money the boss a fat turd but
it's not a job a sign of security this is a lot of shit I'm a writer I
don't have to get that job I have to get something though at this
point I'm almost completely alone I make no group identifications
except through fantasy and they're running wilder and wilder:
the business about getting a job through the show getting into
something like the Warhol group how much do I know about it?
which would be I guess a fringe existence I keep telling myself

go out and find something meaning somebody a social contact
yuk viz this empty city transportation who'd read this shit any-
[12] way F.I.T. might not be worth beans in the way of jobs with the
depression also my hostility unwillingness to buckle down except
here Lenny sits beside me reading a book I should finish this
soon so we can make love he can relax and get some sleep I used
to think that I was mainly supporting us putting out most of the
effort told Lenny he'd have to do the same one day I'm getting
more desperate now Martha calls Lenny does he want to see
Joshua when she doesn't know when she'll have time to meet him
there's tension but not as bad as it used to be I wonder if Lenny
will now like Martha I feel like calling up Melvin telling him all
this now trying to keep my fantasy light I keep holding back on
the feelings putting it down and quickly changing I don't want to
push myself when I have to invent I don't know if I can conti-
nue seeing Martha again might help getting that straight? she
said something to Lenny about being friends with Acker at least
on her side all these names make it sound like there's something
happening lots of activity this writing the real event between
Lenny and I he's happy about seeing Joshua again I'm holding
back following only those feelings for events I care little about
like wanting to call Melvin Laird again denied the Laos invasion
Mark says he'll help me out with the back-up job this is getting
ridiculous I keep rewriting I've lost contact don't want to push the
stuff like I did two days ago, put down that I don't want Jerry
to go need friends I love him

couldn't sleep last night I finally tried to fall asleep by having a fantasy about sleeping with Armand Paul's getting disturbed by this climbing over my lap trying to eat the food I realized it was ridiculous I have no desire to sleep with Armand (or none that I know of) the whole dream was prompted by a remark I made earlier to Lenny about how Armand and Jerry were alike it hit me at that moment I wanted to sleep with Jerry more accurately I love Jerry I had been saying before Jerry's a wonderful poet person I really admire him it's nice he's our friend though it's really hard to be comfortable with someone so much older than you for the last month or so I've noticed I've become ~~uneasy around~~ tense around Jerry uneasy when we're alone together I would go out of my way to avoid such situations I had a thing about not kissing or touching him actually made up a problem I had about kissing or touching anybody as when Charlie kissed me goodnight couldn't meet his eyes while talking to him up here with Lenny I decided that I couldn't because I am going crazy to that extent there's a crisis coming that I can feel but in this case the wrong motivation about 1:00 A.M. I got up Lenny was asleep since he had to get up at 9:00 I didn't want to wake him I had tried calling Melvin before but Melvin as usual funky I didn't at that time know what was happening I put on an old robe I had gotten at the Put-On thrift store my coat a pair of open slippers it was cold with the hope Jerry would be also wandering outside in the hall went down the stairs but there was no sound around his door he was supposed to leave for California at 5:30 A.M. he wasn't in the hall so I went back to the apartment got back into bed I wanted desperately to see Jerry to somehow tell him what had been going on why I had been acting abstractly when he said goodbye and before after Diane left I was scared I would not

show my feelings shake hands or some other shit I knew there
[14] was some tension feeling between us at this time I didn't know
to what extent Jerry realized my feelings though I didn't in any
conscious manner at that moment finally holding him I don't
remember if I kissed him I was acting as I was very upset in love
with him neither do I know how Jerry felt and feels I know there
is reciprocal feeling I don't know to what extent he is conscious of
all this ! I was completely and rather stupidly oblivious of my
desire to touch him talk to him I still think it untenable to sleep
with him since Jerry couldn't tell Di and I like Di myself do not
want to live with Jerry to do anything that would cause more ten-
sion between them Diane seems to be coming into herself through
the anthropology she feels as important to herself as does Jerry to
her which I gather is new Jerry obviously aware of this sticks up
for his own side yesterday at lunch they were arguing about Boaz
Diane didn't like his work as a critical anthropologist she said
he just collected data denied the value of critical theory himself
having no theory gave incorrect or unusable data Jerry said he did
what other anthropologists don't do had respect for the people
he worked among and for their culture which he was preserving
anot belying it by observing only through his private theories
about their social structure or what not he regarded not only their
lives as equal in importance to ours and his but also their minds
ways of thought and feeling as valuable as ours he didn't want to
impose his perceptual structure on theirs which is what on the
whole the modern anthropologist does Lenny calls he's going
out to Hicksville his son's there from California for about four
days I feel terrible don't want to go out there and have to deal
with the whole googling family at this time badly need privacy
this putting down I feel guilty about Joshua and Lenny's old

marriage I also don't give a shit and don't want to be bothered
have to leave the cats alone I like the idea of being by myself for
a night and doing what I feel like Lenny sounds upset over the
phone about my unwillingness to go out there he won't admit
he is which doesn't matter I can't really write like this Lenny [15]
calls again and it's O.K. my wanting to finish so it's all down
in the right way it's getting fucked up I don't know how to get
away earlier I thought of writing to Jerry would I have to get the
letter past Diane? the baloney fantasies about flying to see him
his car breaking down so he can come back I thought if I acted
crazy even earlier he said to Lenny slash his tires it's not the
sexual desire screw that a way simply of release I want to get rid
of the next four months not have to live through them go back in
time to Jerry in this house talking to us getting hot over his cigar
straggly hair he doesn't want to cut I want this putting down to
be a way of getting him close getting him to know this making
it so that ~~the our love doesn't disappear~~ *the love between us doesn't*
disappear I keep rediscovering what I feel.

[16] listening to Nico's music again actually John Kale I even check on the spelling I shouldn't be doing this because I'm too tired slightly drunk Lenny with Martha in the back room is sorting out their old stuff talking in my usual paranoid egocentric way about me I hear yeh Lenny how does that feel Nico interrupts I'm so ~~un~~ unsure of myself who I am these days wonder if it's a breakdown which way? I feel when we walk back with Joshua like I'm no one I'm competing with Joshua for Lenny's attention and feelings guess who wins so sitting at the edge of the door two cats I play let's buy some razor blades that's too many years old I can hear Lenny's and Martha's voices again it sounds like gossip maybe not I decide to go outside up the flight of stairs to the roof outside there's rain lots of cold so I can screw myself cuddle myself up into a space which is untouchable Francis (kicked out of the theatre by the shits for stealing) told me about the untouchables I was asking about Kali he said there were castes? families? in India of prostitutes hermaphrodites or fucked up secondary sex characteristics the gods Kali are actually manifestations of the main three I have to pee shivers are running up and down my back for the first time in days I feel at ease not empty Jerry gone Lenny and Martha are discussing their marriage it makes a lot of sense from the tree hang apples at the same time I was pissed off at Lenny for not offering me some of the money he made this week he said some shit about how we split everything half half when I asked which was beyond the point finally him having some extra money I wanted some recognition I don't know as who whenever he tries to baby me or treat me like a female I get uptight a thousand ways to run the world I also didn't want ~~to~~ him to tell me to come out to Bernice's any pressure that way I was pissed off I so ended up getting no sleep irritable not enough food not thinking

enough I finally told Lenny I didn't want to see his mother who had told Vicki that she didn't like me wanted us to break up so he could go back with Martha and Joshua my paranoia's really at a peak I got furious with Lenny when he didn't understand me literally I've been telling him not to take me literally when I'm upset I speak to draw attention to my being upset or what not finally I had to come out Joshua was screaming his shitty head off daddy daddy I even kissed Julia hello hating her she kept being nice so I went to get sandwiches have dinner together Joshua made a fucking mess all over the place I should get sterilized I hate kids from being with Jerry and realizing I'm really drunk that I'm like him him like me I can see where I'm not tough the fantasy how 18m like a kid which is all the trouble about jobs I keep having this suicide desire like I can't get along I'm a butch or a fem? I'm the one who has fantasies about homosexuals which is why I'm getting caught up in the 7th avenue shit anyway ruined by the depression not my market I identify with scum yuk anyone who's nuts I'm so fucking scared I say I want to get ahead knowing I'll stop myself like I have graduate school etc. bums of the world unite there's too much going that I haven't gotten easy with how to get it out even on 42nd street where Mark's ways scare me I don't want to leave want to get out even though I am driving myself insane tomorrow's Sunday morning lots of rest

[17]

[18] we were on 7th avenue buying mysteries a cookbook for Lenny since he has stopped eating meat the lights started to waver a salesman tells us get out sorry they don't know what is happening after four shows mostly lousy half of 7th avenue blacked out all of 42nd street as far as we could see the American Legion wins Bob Wolf the goddamn shit manager calls up as we're sitting upstairs in the theatre emergency lights on don't leave there was an explosion at the 42nd street Con Ed station the fucking roaches in this place at my skin I signal to Lenny the weathermen no one's sympathetic good for them (weathermen) but of course we can't leave in case the management can make another five bucks out of us it's pouring rain I can't tell what I'm hearing with the fan on I say no show unless there's at least three people as if I can shove Bob Wolf and co. up the ass and their crutty five bucks we don't do the 12:30 show Lenny talked to his kid before surprisingly Joshua wasn't upset happy to speak to Lenny wants pictures of him and the cats Lizzy's sick no other personal conversations during the day I feel like I'm cutting myself off from other people getting more uptight about seeing anyone unless there's some intensity already there I talk about commitments but that's phoney I was happy when Martha was over talking to Lenny even when we had gone to get rid of Joshua and talk to her keep seeking more privacy at the same time I've been hotter for Lenny I really wanted to touch him last night suck his cock his very flesh was desirable I haven't before felt that ~~way~~ easy I really got hot moving on top of him and kissing his face and neck trying to fuck him and make him come earlier I had been feeling strange like I had too much energy I even said to Lenny some shit about a nervous breakdown that damn actually good movie we saw Chabrol I hadn't felt bad about

Martha but I was wondering if that was what was making me feel and act nervy I didn't want to get completely out of touch I had bought myself an expensive ring \$18. that always makes me nutty I really wanted it and felt shouldn't spend the money shouldn't spend money it's bad you've gotta save up money or you might get in trouble there's too much that you have to protect yourself against and be able to save yourself from I want stuff even more I don't have to look the same I was thinking out loud to Lenny about my interest in Art Noveau recent the way in which we delineate the fantasies by which we live easy then to make them glitter the way in which he tells me today actors are attractive so here we are on 42nd street at least we get the full weekly bread in spite of the blackout Con Ed should go and ram themselves up their assholes ~~I was telling Irv~~ Irv was telling me some friend of his does construction work for them not unionized gets paid crap they give the big boozers politicians their private generators so that the latter can pass bills no private generators cookers allowed by the poor we end up being struck both ways the subways might not be running I don't know how we'll get home there's nothing I'd rather do than sleep in the bed we pretend to fuck on I have to get out of here for approximately five minutes I got to talk to Martha I was blabbing about the show said my usual crap it's not as bad as most jobs I don't have to ball anyone she said it sounds like you're reciting a cataphism as if I was really talking and able to speak to her she had been consistently and not overtly hostile to me since she entered the house these fucking roaches are coming closer ~~and~~ I've got nowhere else to write maybe they won't crawl up me Lenny will return he's getting something to eat I keep seeing them at the edge of my glasses have to finish this off so I can piss check on the cop situation I just came up from the

[19]

bathroom first time I've taken a break in one of these things getting lazy I've been tired all day didn't even want to dance Julia was asking me about my parents do I see or hear from them I didn't know if she had forgotten the whole business or not about how they pissed on me when I was sick obviously didn't give a damn if I died then called me up and told me that I had given
[20] my father a heart attack I was pissed off at her anyway because of what she had told Vicki so I didn't want to answer had to explain to her like she too dumb to know what goes on between parents and their kids if I keep pretending I'm not upset about this I'll get away from myself maybe I'm actually fed up figure I'll get love on 42nd street Lenny's good for me he sympathizes even though he's not at all like me he's probably close in his character to Martha only Martha keeps saying o that's his fantasy meaning that's not important I dreamt last night about fucking Jerry just got a card from him today I don't remember anything else it might have been more a fantasy because I woke up wanting to go back to sleep where I was I've spent the last four years of my life deciding the way in which I get money by refusing to do anything that would not let me over-sleep

I hope that I'm not writing too much spent the last hour masturbating immediately started licking for the first time sucked my nipple it was good but I had to maintain this time a fantasy couldn't come otherwise masturbating makes clear what I want to do sexually and generally because of my need for a strong fantasy I get so messed up wondering who I want to fuck playing with ideas and dreams I'm so alone that I forget at any moment what my drives for that moment are or I become easily confused I finally can come to terms with the incident with Amy I was hung up on the idea of sleeping with a girl outside of business had already worked with Amy twice got along with her nothing more except I knew she liked me Lenny liked her she had that little girl attitude actually she's very young said or we said I don't remember come over some time she came up it was very tense we were smoking and she wouldn't talk Lenny went out to get some groceries Amy became tenser I knew she wanted me pushed myself kissed her etc. I thought at that time it was a drag because she wanted me to do everything I was unwilling also a bit ignorant that matters shit I now think she wanted my affection more than any sort of role I keep being hung up about this lesbian business because I won't say to myself the obvious I want to be in love with a girl I keep putting in sex it's the desire to be equal not top or bottom and fully recognized as equal and other I've got a cock and you've got a cock of course no other desire could be as powerful I don't know if I could so easily prostitute that sex as I do now however I operate as an actor it's not a theatre though I believe it to be the shits can't even get a theatre license I have to be able to write I'm being lazy and letting myself take shit I should quit ha ha I'm also living in a heavily fantasized world as I deal more and more writing this I can't write about anything else

because I don't know anything else I tried calling up
 [22] Toni tonight no answer I'm scared shit to talk to anyone unless
 I know them well maybe F.I.T. will get me through this privacy's
 good I can put down all I want the Lizard just vomited again
 I ~~was scared~~ feared blood but no she's pretty sick I'm a bit scared
 don't want to sleep with a girl not just mechanically I keep edging
 away from any situation that has the remotest possibility even
 fantasy of becoming strong Lizard's crying so I better stay in
 the livingroom with her it's too cold I'm scared to carry her out
 because she might vomity again Paul's sucking his nipple and
 scratching my arm so I can barely write he can be a pain though
 I've gotten him this way by babying him I keep yelling at him
 I'll have to go soon to see if Lizard's O.K. whatever I mean by
 that she's obviously miserable I'm here alone in the bedroom not
 feeling bored or lonely I tell Lizard she'll have to go to the doctor
 tomorrow she blinks I don't want to take a cab but I don't know
 how else I'll get there I used to use Jerry I probably am lonely dig
 it because I feel tough it drives me to do this maybe in a few days
 or weeks get off my ass I'm at a point of nuttiness where there's
 no movement I just do this be with Lenny manage to wipe my ass
 and other daily requirements so I'm nobody's nuisance the show
 is like the lowest way to make the basic bread completely without
 responsibility except for the twenty minutes after I get on stage
 I always forget my lines get pissed scared about cops a new thrill
 every time I have such an exciting life the angels no wonder I'm
 spending all my time writing a diary I made six trips emptying the
 garbage today got dressed went downtown to meet Lenny for an
 hour before he had to leave tried to call a few people Jerry sent us
 a postcard from Atlanta a godawful motel plastic air on one side
 what hath god wrought on the other side an arrow pointing to a

room on the fifth floor how can I stop this bed from vibrating I
won't be able to write to him probably for about two weeks

[23] I wrote last night I might go back take account of the stuff I wrote before this angels etc. then I was not putting down this directly still interested in poetry and in identifying through language and symbolic conventions with criminal groups I was not able to do so in anyone's eyes but my own however I don't think that I used such inflated language idiotically I still have many of the feelings for that use the most surface a desire along with everyone else in New York to know Warhol otherwise: intense hatred for men actually for anyone overbearing on me pushing me into a high-powered situation the typical business meeting since I work on 42nd street this happens for me mainly with males a long with this a lack of sympathy for those I meet who don't consciously live through and in their fantasies if you want to inflate this to a religion who are very tight with themselves in the actions and thoughts they allow to be real I find I can talk only to those people who are loose in the ways they live to the extent of perversity a strange addiction to 42nd street I find it hard anyway to talk to strange people social climbing situations scare the shit out of me like that L. Hornick? party Jerry took us to I accidentally took too much belladonna I want to bring in the total way we experience that's shit I suspect I experience in many ways not just logically and sensorally whatever that means if I put this all down step by step maybe it'll be obvious how things work it hasn't been yet in fact I'm wondering if in this stuff I'm not going slow enough still taking too much for granted which is what fucked up my last series I couldn't get hold of enough Lenny's writing now which is an incentive for me to keep going I want also to be able to put down on the spot how I experience each event even these words make it seem like there's an inside experiencing mechanism and an outside event because I constantly change lie forget the

lie was a lie invent on top of that I want a record of the way in which I remember and distort or refind experience through time though that's my private shit since my life can't be this fascinating to anyone else

[24]

something pleases me about putting trivial incidents down as they happen one by one I don't know what I don't care if I remember properly in fact I remember none of my pre-school childhood don't think that I give a damn Paul's sucking on his nipple leaning on my arm he's been sick today Lizard's much sicker my arm's hurting and Lenny's getting pissed off that he's sucking on his nipple per usual but I'm not going to get upset like hell Lenny just threw him out by the neck I don't want him too there's something important about putting this down that might come I'm not being direct enough even in this stuff worry when I type about commas spaces prettying up the shit I get more hung up maybe I should stop writing for a while that's painful then I cling to all this crap like designing clothes acting terrific careers because I'm so brilliant and smart the modelling successfully got rid of the pretty business after all I went to Brandeis I decide to go to F.I.T. tonight I couldn't take it anymore didn't want to be apart from Lenny for two nights because of this shit insecurity desire to get a good job I need it like a hole in my head I always make out borrowing living with someone doing some shit where I'm not with enemies like I used to be Lenny tells me F.I.T.'s a good idea I should at all times be able to earn sufficient money which means he doesn't want the responsibility of me good for him for us? I don't want the responsibility either I tell myself for years I put on a good pretense of being very responsible and sensible especially about money I don't want to fool Lenny so I keep telling him how I'm really mindless about the shit that's not true I supported him

and me when I was fucking sick doing dirty movies then the live show he pushed us into that? getting sick of screwing fag hustlers two bad scenes with photographers it looked like a good bargain we kept saying it's only for a few weeks Lenny can get a terrific job whenever he wants as long as I keep writing I keep steady I'm not so ready to disappear get hung up on Lenny's drives as long as that's material like when Martha was here that might not
[25] be true I was blowing my top all day about Joshua and wanted Martha to like me say it was O.K. what I did going off with Lenny to Frisco she's never going to say that she doesn't talk to me or when she does she patronizes me which I hate as much as I do the men in the show tomorrow we can go to hear Malanga read who I've never heard at one point I worshipped his writing when I was in school having seen him at L. Hornick's piss I thought it less interesting now I think it interesting not as real as Jerry's the lousy book he did for Black Sparrow which was shit of course I want him to notice me which he's not going to do always goes around with Vogue models and sees himself in that strange way I tell Lenny what I'm going to do tomorrow get the ring fixed go to F.I.T. about a full course scholarship? he says see Ted Roth another sleezy agent probably like Nolan a Shakespearian accent over his toity-tird street one he won't want to make me but rather put me in various demeaning situations sexually what else I tell Lenny this he says yeh but the movie pays \$100. a day 10 days of work which is true I'm certainly the one who spends most of our dough now Lenny lies beside me reading the presentation of self waiting for me so he can get some sleep he works tomorrow his hair's pushed back into a ponytail and wrinkles are lining the top of his face

the angels are making me into a distortion pulling out my eyes [26]
destroying my brains

[27] I have to write something we have to do three shows tonight six seven? tomorrow also the 12:30 show tonight but Lenny called up Mr. Big Shit said no dice he bitched no dice it was we'll probably get fired I won't be able to go through with it unless I get this down something besides the shows I'm getting more and more uptight about doing them I count them three and a half more months 16 more days 96 more shows we might have to do emergency show I don't want anything to do with sex I've gotten completely Puritan I love Lenny who else I love will love that's something else I'm no known sex and aren't going to be touched like I were America the middle class punks shit-asses li-ber-als have gone sex nuts they're becoming gay until they find something else tricks for kicks can you imagine it fucking some rich power-hungry creep because you want to not because you're broke need junk etc. Miss J.P. Morgan says I do it all the time you're such a girl Johnny Carson all-American eunuch white jacket white pleated pants three face lifts wrinkled dick fucking seems to be a new way of throwing more bombs all promoted by 42nd street I make sure to tell everyone I meet for the first time I don't fuck it's gotten so you meet someone by sucking them off hopefully lesbians have more sense I don't enter that society because it's the only one left to idealize I'd rather get back rubs it's a drag to fuck your ass out I'm already screwing myself up denying my sex and my feelings about my sex in this job I've been doing that for years if I have to do it when I actually fuck blow etc. doesn't everyone just like to ball I mean if you just have to love the person you're balling you're pretty repressed we've all got to be spontaneous I'd have to be dealing with myself in two forms it would be the end the destruction I've been fighting for the last six years first seeing it in my parents the people whose blood I

come from then in the whole society now in the people I meet the ones I used to smoke with feel were closest and part of me they don't know what they're doing denying all religion and feelings I've become completely alienated I have my books Lawrence this putting down this kind of counting up my cats pad on my stomach and breasts is stupid there's a fire what should I save I still don't believe I'm real and going to stay that way no wonder I tell Lenny on the train that his feelings are more important than mine we went to Malanga's reading a bunch of models sat in front of us gorgeous ruined females their hair made into fur Saint Laurent clothes a 40ish 50ish? short grey haired guy who kept babbling o puke puke how darling that flower in your hair is the best thing I've seen all night yum yum he had on a grey leather Saint Laurent jacket it's getting late 11pm not going to have ~~time~~ much more time Lenny comes in from the bath looking like an angel other people less rich more degenerate and interesting one beautiful female Patty Smith Lenny screams at me for letting Paul suck his nipple bull shit Malanga's reading at first turned me off I had trouble with all the people around ~~me~~ I was in another world I kept flipping into feeling it was fake I thinks he flips the same way at the middle end I got into it the diary like poems were terrific I was very jumpy for the rest of the night kept Lenny up for five hours because he didn't love me I wanted him to it was my fault at first though I told him I was hardly there very shaky I can't deal with fucking when I'm that precarious I hurt him which started it when Lenny gets hurt he disappears is not able or does not make an effort to touch me to help get out what is going on I have to keep making steps hope that he is somewhere and I'm not violating him more I feel like I should be a female even when I'm upset by something else he doesn't make a strong attempt like

[28]

saying come here to hold me I have to ask him I feel at ease with
Lenny I don't have to constantly fight him to let me do things
I can do this it makes the shows worthwhile doing what I have
[29] to materially so that I remain uncommitted alone except where I
know I want to be I need time lots of it to achieve some of that
paradise I dreamt last night angelichood I'd be dead otherwise
I need a place in which I can do exactly at every moment even
passively what I please

VERY TIRED

earlier I did this to get rid of the show annihilate my present there make emeralds of our knowledge a bunch of shit I tore up I screamed at Lenny the fifth show he didn't exist I had no one to act to I hate the audience on the subway I was asking him why he was turned off last night I had asked him that night he said he didn't know what I was talking about I hadn't gotten to sleep for the last two nights we were hugging I said no fucking I'll blow you my ovary's sore true my period due in a few days it still hasn't come godfucking pregnant horror any other sex groovy I'll suck you after I said this he felt better Lizzy came up I patted her he got turned off stopped stroking my cunt and stomach wanted only to fuck it was the only way we could be close no dice he went to sleep the new dancer at the theatre Ellen gorgeous long white blond hair thin body long nipples of course Lenny wants to fuck her he finally said it on the train this morning that's why he was cold tonight he says no he doesn't know why I feel dead from the theatre I want to get this over with so I can go to sleep I hope that I can get down the minimum crap necessary so I don't feel I've done shit how close and deep? I can barely move there's a fucking dog barking my eyes burn I can't even drink I don't look at Lenny when I talk to him on the train he gives me a bunch of spreads during the shows bites me pulls my nipple up with his teeth I don't give a damn I just want to get the thirty minutes over with don't even care what I do please the shits sex hungry mongrels yap yap at my cunt like Fan's act there's a purple clock on stage god forbid Jesus a show should run a minute short the

customers complain they look at their watches shifts business fucks
 in napalm jocks I can't do anything anymore I'm so fucking tired
 I want Lenny to be closer to me like a new religion he says that
 he doesn't understand when people talk that way yet he doesn't
 disagree with me when I put down logical common-sense explanations like I want it Lenny and I to be there I feel there are things
 [31] forces? bonds? feelings? feelings that are there it's connected to
 my fear of being brainwashed by someone thing not able to want
 freely constantly shoved around pushed back into a space a space
 that doesn't exist Lenny tells me that he isn't being cold now he's
 watching the cats playing with the Lizard's tail I bring my foot
 on his leg then over his cock he likes it onto the hair around his
 cock his hand touched my foot maybe he won't be cold tonight
 scare me that I don't know I don't put it in any terms to myself
 I keep telling myself I don't want to split up the books it'd be a
 drag we both like the same ones we went out to dinner with
 Mickey Mark's boyfriend he only got a drink he's lovely when he's
 not around Mark also around very talkative not very female he
 came from a farm in Indiana wants to go back there or some kind
 of farm life Lenny asks if he's bothering me if he can ha persuade
 Mark he used to artificially impregnate cows by shoving some bag
 up their cunts and release the contents wring chickens' necks he
 told us how he can smell death after he went to his grandfather's
 funeral the smells of flowers he said one day he entered a shoe
 store the smell the guy gets a heart attack another time at church
 he told his mother Mrs. *Blah* would die who did the night his
 grandfather died before his family had learned of the death he his
 brothers were frightened by footsteps on the wood porch in front
 of the house later I have another fantasy about Lenny leaving me
 do I care will I flip out It's fun to play with I glorify my anguish

I can really feel I'll make myself coo-coo I'd rather pet Paul kiss
him between his legs Mark calls today keeps asking about Lenny
and interrupting me so I'm pissed can hear Mickey giggling about
our new script and about our being broke when we went to see
Malanga's film last night

[32] went to see the Gertrude Stein collection too many fucking rich biddies young fat cunts thousand dollar clothes twenty people to a painting right out of art history school I figured what the hell I don't even like the impressionists cubists for the moment saw a gorgeous creature I think the pregnant girl at the end of trash? doesn't matter thick curly black hair partially done up in pigtails to enhance the thickness very thin bones like the early Madonnas no chin the first stigmata heavy black shoes and black stockings of the nunnery shapeless clothes partially black the other stigmata a kid without hair I kept looking at her at first trying not to be obvious but gave that up followed her over the second floor was she noticing me was she following me still not known another girl was with her a young politico only expensive shoes not so interesting at least from looks she bumped into me once I was mainly interested in Magritte Beckmann etc. they're in the basement not in style yeh yeh I didn't care where I was going (except for Matta the light) I picked up on her rate of progress got so good at following her that for the final lap I proceeded there was also an old dame 30's grey hair stylish Afro velvet thrift store who might have been with them I don't know an ugly kid I didn't want to go up to the third floor again following the bitch nothing was happening? I left for Burt's office I kiss the cats up and down their bellies Paul and I can really make it I kiss his forehead pull his skin with my teeth take hold of an ear and pull it in a circle kiss between his legs down to his balls I don't think they've fallen yet I tried kissing his balls but he doesn't dig that for now I hold his paw in my hand press my finger between his pads curling his paw in and out rub the whole length of the back foot they have nightmares sometimes their mouths start trembling and then their muscles shake they could be pre-epileptic I wonder what I

[33]

have about them it's not just wanting a kid I hate kids Joshua drives me nuts after an hour I don't even like people easily deeply? blah I've got something big about these cats I'm happy when they're sleeping with us Lizzy just ate a piece of string they let go completely arch their backs and stomachs so they can rub against us more easily our bodies are fetishes cure them of their diseases they hate other people with some few exceptions scare the way we do and hide I can't open myself to Lenny the way Paul spreads his legs for me it takes me more disintegration destruction of my mistrust I find out that Lenny feels as I do even more so having let himself go when I thought I had to push him to feel something for me he thinks of our love as the ~~im~~ most important event at present he says I don't even know if I do I'm able to remember my dreams for the last two days nightmares about underwater creatures last night only a pool I was pretty wet though because I've got my period the tampax hurts I hate these fucking things the blood's much nicer don't have to shove crap up my cunt I wake up wanting Lenny to be next to me the last two days I haven't been scared haven't fought about my sex or the dislike I feel I want to fuck which is new it's the first time really wanting to fuck physically though I've been ~~doing so~~ fucking for years since I was fourteen I've been all hung up and not known it since I needed reassurance so badly I fucked anyway I could always come easily my ~~fucking~~ goddamn grandmother just sent me a valentine's card saying call me I should lick her ass the shits they're so bugged I don't lick their asses any longer I did even when I was married let them fuck me acquiesce in all their holy judgements without saying why like the rest of this country they tell you do this don't do this you're not allowed to know any reasons much less ask questions they did are doing their best to destroy me I

[34] should go down again marry the big rich shit Lenny and I are something else I decide that my grandmother didn't send me anything I'm going to deal with them by not dealing with them there are no more parents no more possessive feelings it works so simply I'll wake up in the morning wanting Lenny to be next to me I'll kiss the kissle cats masturbate shit get some tea and bread

you have to become a criminal or a pervert I'm in the bathtub
touching the bones in my face I have no idea what I feel like I
never touch myself except for occasionally masturbating a few
times stick a finger up my asshole or lick my nipple I draw my fin-
gers around the back of my neck I want to shave my hair off again
toes knees I admire criminals in my head knowing they're shits
businessmen motherfuckers like everyone else I don't want to fuck
it doesn't mean what it should no one thinks like this anymore I
say angelic I'm sick of fucking and not knowing who I am

[35]

[36] last night I dreamt about Malanga I'm walking through Central Park at the reading he mentioned he lived at 985? Mad. near C. P. he's with Iris she greets me I'm babysitting for Clorinda of course mud all over our faces he says yeh you can wash yourself off at my place there's a gorgeous girl waiting for him the opposite of me I wash myself he wants to take pictures god knows how this was a dream more like the usual comic strip fantasy I take off my clothes no hassle a bunch of other things I don't remember the girl leaves I tell I like her she's beautiful I have to figure out how I can get him to fuck me I don't want to ask so that he'll do it of his own volition Lenny gets up has to get to work early this week since Burt's gone I'm in a lousy mood scared that Elizabeth's going to vomit the creep swallowed a huge string last night if she vomits she has to have an operation to remove the string no sign by 2:00 this afternoon it takes me 45 minutes to get back to dreaming a pond I could get out of awful water monsters I decide to get up part of my attention is gone seven people to my left all creeps playing some cards they look like creeps short hair I have short hair white sweaters it's obvious when creeps are creeps in this case two arty people in front of me I'll decide I'm somewhere else with Melvin or Larry I miss them I often handle ! ! shitty situations by deciding fantasizing? I have friends I'll see them again I wish it was quiet at least I have an importance completely self-contained isolated like uglified models the Art Nouveau framing in gilt fake jewels of immediate fantasy I used to feel that I had to feel at ease in a crowd especially feeling no identity I should want to be alone because then I couldn't be bothered I shouldn't bother anyone I can't stand cool partings cop-outs weeping when Lenny didn't get me an anniversary present on 54th street somebody was filming some clothes the subway also two arty-farts are

[37]

discussing the difference between symbols and signs one's simpler
than the other the guy has a French accent huge nose he should
be a deafmute writing's magical I used to play in the attic 7 or
8 years ago I used to go to the library it was all wrong except the
desire outside it's snowing off and on I'm cold he called every
place in town you can have one made in any color \$400. each
everybody-s wearing velvet yeh Levi-Strauss I mean that there are
many ways in which we experience we don't have the language
we don't recognize ourselves angels other glorious beings we're
fucking now Hannah wants to go to bed with you I shouldn't put
this down things have been going well between Lenny and me
they weren't for the last six months I'm good for the last two days
enterring myself moving slowly into my way of being touching
the cats ~~I remember my dreams~~ remembering my dreams I have
wanting to go outside go places though still impersonal ones Film
Archives I'm not picking up my hand because I know what's in
yours the guy from downstairs complains about the typing creep
short hair ass

[38] coming out of the poetry reading 11:30 Malanga movie more and more uptight until my mind's a knot I can't seem to think fade in and out Lenny touches me he tells me he tells Hannah I'm not always like this behind the trivia snowing in my brain I get another drambuie the shit tells us it's \$2. each for the movie we heard it was free Malanga sitting there as it was announced we're broke the projector doesn't work the subways were out of order I can't wait I'm getting tighter more submerged we dream touching each other's genitals interconnections we fly through the corridors into the other worlds never completely forgetting our bond relinquishing our ties

Lenny and I argued all night it's 10:00 about Lawrence I thought [39]
Lenny was being ridiculously intellectual Lawrence should have
a theory of society not being logical he could have been a fascist
i.e. early Mussolini admirer that got me really pissed because I'm
really digging Lawrence Lenny isn't being serious enough com-
paring his own experience to each incident phrase he thinks he's
not implicated I feel like I'm reading my future history I'm finding
out who I could be presentation of characters development of the
plot crap I keep thinking that Lawrence is going to find out what's
happening to me now Lenny's sleeping in the bedroom in the
bed naked I'm here in the back room with a typewriter a desk
Martha's desk her piano other of her crap some of my dresses two
sleeping bags Lenny's clothes it's a cruddy room I didn't get rid
of the white walls I want to paint them big gold squares wrap-
ping paper fake gold's cheap I don't have to paint the woodwork
the cats are eating maybe I will soon put Elizabeth here I have
a lot more work tonight I should be with Lenny blooey it's not
that important I've been running temperature all day weak in the
head I'll make it into a crisis screwed up ovary again I even had a
conversation with Bob the shit today in which we were trying to
be kind of nice to each other he's kept me on so long he's part of
a group of hippy entrepreneurs they have enough money to be in
the middle class anti-establishment they have real long hair I'm a
hippy I tell him not to fire me I have a regular audience it's nice
to have a kid two days old I don't even hate myself getting off the
phone for being such a liar ass-sucker blower I hated the tension
my hatred I can't give up the job how well my brain's working to-
day I can even pretend I want a kid a bee-yoo-ti-ful baby boy fur
clothes no hair five Bloomingdale cribs ivory soap skin I'll kiss his
cock would I have to have a husband I could make a robot money

[40] giver machine worship window panes sliver asses the neighbors
shove garbage up their cunts I'm sick of do-gooders Lenny was
pissing me off the set of rules he's making yap yap yap Mark kept
interrupting me saying yeh I used to hang out at Max's asking
how Lenny was meaning will Lenny sleep with me again I'm no
fucking pimp I don't say that I spent the whole day lying even
here I'm wearing a bunch of shit rings antique furs and neck-
laces running into my huge ass there are three cunts in my fingers
50 cents a throw any hour of the day except while asleep hidden
orifices in my underarms and sweat glands Lizzy lately likes to
lick my hair comes down to my eyebrows sweeps out into candy
canes gold surrounds the lower part of my eyes down to the back
of my neck penetrating the skin into the marrow sacred of the
spine I react to all sexual innuendoes a 42nd street initiate now
I've got five rings attached to my buttocks given to me by Matta
hidden in splendour in the basement of the Museum of Modern
Art because he's not stylish content isn't these days i could get
fucked once an hour for seven days I can even fuck when I've
got my special spaceman suit the confessional I'd rather give up
my dough I've been thinking about writing down the affair at
Mark's place I don't give enough of a shit I'm pissed off at Lenny
tight mind high temperature I could get something to eat I'm
sitting here stewing here's Lizard a subterranean world-conqueror
bringing mental goodies girl horniness delight for all moving
beings and dead ones I fixed my \$18. ring with glue so I can
wear it now seven tiny jade bits over fake gold filagree white glue
binding special I didn't put the star in the right place and the glue
shows but I want to wear it I don't have any others I can promise
myself that I'll get lots of sleep tonight some pleasant dreams

about canyons and water travelling for once I'll stop feeling this
sick

[41] I reread the first part of this xeroxing too fucking romantic I lead the most unromantic life in the world a new generation of Puritan dope addict moralists we're not talking Hannah just told me dump this bag in one garbage can just garbage this in another garbage can the kid's boots not around here so the mother doesn't know walk north Lenny says it's O.K. by the church I'm doped up by now I walk to second and ninth one can second and tenth the Church's locked there's a box across the street it's late I don't want to walk around this dump the rest of the night purchase two cheap 89¢ pens at the crap store after I finish this leave the whole dumb fuck neighborhood Hannah and Lenny are probably screwing she told me not to come back to the house I don't give much of a shit though it's nice to stare at the World pictures poetry I haven't seen I got grease crap over this goddamn health food store I also bought a \$4. ring crap Lenny's acting uptight all the time again dope music his eyes on every cunt around he's not really bi- only for a day I've got free tea I keep asking what's the matter to Lenny nothing why aren't you talking to me I get guilty god forbid a suburban nagging Wife ha ha Hannah's got to go to the laundry on 12th I tell Lenny fuck it let's quit the Sunday job I'll go back to artists' modelling mention a 9 to 5 job I'd rather prostitute I hated my guts with Millard Lenny and Hannah show up I was walking to the Metro with Hannah she could come to our place Lenny went to get her stuff in case anyone was following the mother the sister we found out they were I saw someone who looked like Harriet I haven't seen her in 6 years a ten-year-old waif I ran after her fucking hell she even knew who I was the marriage had broken up Acker too straight me too woo-woo wanting a family a real wife I was a good actress for a year and a half I didn't even have to say that much which was incredible the

first person to understand she's been in the loony bin two years
now on welfare can't cope with shit at the Hotel Earle? GR 7-8150 [42]
she can't speak I tell her about hearth reading Lawrence I had to
consciously think for a few moments to remember its meaning
I'm doing this to remember those things take note of the disso-
lution she just got a letter from Jerry Sherman in Amsterdam is
Acker O.K.? I don't know we can't talk he's constantly attacking
my existence he doesn't say so I hear he's good got a stable female
Jan Altizer I'm working in a live sex show for bread ha ha six days
of leisure don't have to fuck no boss she says when she looks for
free-lance drawing jobs she doesn't know if the guy wants her to
draw fuck what the connection between the possible two desires
are she'd rather she didn't have a cunt I tell her I shaved my head
she's very close to Mary we should see her sometimes I'm feeling
terrific the first time I've talked to someone actually talking in
years since Jerry left the house I don't feel tight about Hannah
(being tight) I blab a real live taxi flying I call Mary I was hoping
you'd call incredible crap about Melvin he told her that Lenny not
me was freaked out about our all sleeping together she wanted
to go to this one party New Year's Eve told him he dug the place
they were he was the center of attention o I'm a graduate student
at winky-poo studying great masterpieces of culture in reagan
high the brainless ones astounded at the other place he wasn't
making it so well he kept saying to Mary I want to ~~make it~~ sleep
with Malonga Mary pissed because some shit from Inter/view was
giving the party it involved a job for her? something finally Melvin
goes over to Malanga doesn't make it though Malanga kisses him
goodnight we don't like students especially mindless bastards I
tell her about California dope and politics if you good enough to
talk about an individual experience you get shit thrown into your

ass 8th graders shoot amphetamines into the undersides of their
tongues P. Adams he sucks I'm going to see her Monday Lenny
goes to a WIN meeting I realize the job's got me so muddle-
[43] headed everytime I meet someone I dig I think I've got to jump
into bed with her/him I've ended up not seeing anyone there's
probably? nothing like that involved at least not so obviously and
quickly an inverted sex fanaticism I'm so scared I'll have to sleep
with someone I don't (yet) want to being forced to eat someone's
ass Mary says she has to pander to this bitchy old faggot we can't
think of other jobs go to FIT cook for a health food joint! Lenny's
sleeping next to me pissed off he won't tell me why we haven't
fucked for days he's completely dead like all my friends I don't
want to split up I have to clean out the cats' bowls work all day
tomorrow Paul's at his fucking nipple Mary said it might be a
disease cats don't know where their pain is I've really gotten
disconnected from the world I don't know what are sexual cues
behaviorally what each cue if I knew what it was is a cue for I've
sailed to a foreign land I might as well get a real job writing
this shit Paul's sucking on his nipple and not letting me write
maybe having a friend will get me back to the world ha ha I'm too
far gone I'd probably go worse if I realized all the jungle horror
New York is Harriet says I can't cope with this world I can put
down all the stupid things which happen to me I've got a grip on
something I can't go flying into dreams 12:05 put on some cream
music

I was dreaming last night about doing the show this is what I remember much sleazier than it actually is here I close my head to the reality the seats were on different levels like a movie house so I went down to go on stage my father showed up I think I went on something about his having a heart attack yellow he actually did my mother was poisoning him I stole blankets from them at the last possible moment a rough brown one I hid under the steps so that no one could see it I broke with them in the dream they with me even my sister Lenny kept getting up to go to the bathroom at one point I bitched I need sleep we have to work all Sunday every Sunday now is the only reality on an acid trip I remember all other trips nothing of any other life finally went into Hannah's room to get his jacket he said the others weren't warm enough he had no other way to carry his wallet he was bugging me the night before I didn't really want to see Hannah did I I wanted to go home and wouldn't tell him I didn't want to hang around the East Village all night I had yoghurt in the oven lonely pissle babies I had to get some sleep type tomorrow was Sunday he was also scared I would act up (be hostile) I was very nice for the first half hour went to the right garbage cans to the Samsara Hannah was going to stay over for the next week I told her I needed to be alone I hoped she didn't mind if I kept the bedrooms door closed at times O.K. Lenny had not been listening to me been cold not wanting to fuck all week I was nagging him feeling bad that I was nagging even though he said and I knew that he was tired I kept evolving fantasies about his not wanting me some are true: he wants to fuck someone else he wants someone else to talk closely to he doesn't want to do so much work he feels that I'm a burden he doesn't really want to live with just one person but doesn't yet admit that he needs

[44]

to be around many people females I use this to tease myself
make myself feel bad pretend that I'm abandoned penniless my
books gone I don't have any friends anywhere to go to it's all
so romantic I feel dead now two more shows to go my back's
[45] broken out from the filthy bedcover on stage I'm allergic to
this way of life mine? the last time I got on stage for the first
ten minutes I felt I wasn't me I was going through mechanical
personality changes and actions I got scared I might flip in front
of the sex-crazy lunatics finally got into the Santa Claus routine I
was a little girl all excited because Santa Claus was going to bring
me Christmas presents I couldn't go to sleep I was waiting and
waiting and then and then you know what happened doctor Santa
Claus came right into my room I'm taking my clothes my shoes
off rubbing my breasts Lenny dreamt last night about fucking
Cyrelle she was lecturing him on how to fuck a woman he told
her that he didn't need the lecture she thought he was wrong he
was sucking an older woman's cunt it was also a cock without
changing from a this is a romantic section a very romantic life
ha ha I was writing in the projection room the shits said that
they'd clean and wax the floor it's still piss black can't see
no roaches no more it's hotter than usual the projectionist was
constantly bugging me some guy they say drunk hit Josie on her
ass during her show yesterday his hat the cashier says he came
up told him you're not allowed to do that you've been drinking
you're not allowed to bring liquor up here then the cashier an
Indian guy turns to Washington an old black janitor tells him
that he's not to come again on the weekends he has no mind
he can't remember anything he's not to ask to get paid again he
gets \$1. he's too old he won't be able to work much longer he's
sick he's senile he's looking at me red bleary eyes we're at the

Embers cruddy food at least no one's taking off his clothes they all want to Screw this week (we find in the projection room) is about orgies mentions every place but ours only the fuzz know about 113 swingers Screw says are very jealous about their mates? you can't get involved with a girl you fuck at an orgy unless you've got her guy's O.K. which isn't they say likely I don't know about vice-versa at an orgy everyone wants to have everyone else only once no two guys together the males want to watch the females screw so that occurs it turns them on the best orgy I ever went to a cunt's writing started with two girls making it on the living-room floor Lenny tells me Lawrence is a romantic Kangaroo red and black striped overalls no hair I don't know what the fuck to do with it I'm getting to look so ugly it won't do anything like stand straight out fuzz into balls two more shows and everything's over I felt dead writing before I could be dead now waking up I got a sacred Mexican ring yesterday to do just that remember every single dream for the next two weeks as soon as I wake up not getting so pissed off all the time completely hostile I'd like this jewels isolated fragments this life's not romantic enough too hidden yet to be found in the fucking brain and mind I have to get back to the show Lenny's putting his coat on son of a bitch ciao good-bye a bientot [46]

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[47] after we had dinner at this god awful chinese restaurant fake chinese gardens the waiter shit wouldn't give another bowl to us for the winter melon soup for two on the menu Mickey was barely able to kiss Mark goodbye we went to Mark's house 13th and A stories about how if you venture out there after dark one block or more you automatically get raped mugged castrated we smoked went into the bedroom to see the new waterbed it was gorgeous like being in the ocean the waves lapping back and forth it was the only thing in the room except for a tape deck white wall no curtains Mark said he was going to paint the walls different shades of blue striped in a funnel effect the rug would be dyed to match the ceiling the floor would be an actual funnel you'd go right through I was completely smashed Mark was hot for Lenny spent an hour? two hours? making those absurd hints he only wanted to sleep with Ellen the new dancer Lenny was playing dumb too smashed or not digging he finally said do you want to sleep with me Lenny didn't want me to leave the room I didn't want to leave the waterbed under any circumstances my dress kept getting undone earlier in the evening Mark had been kissing me he gave a speech about male male fucking god knows why he ever wants a female I said I the fucking cats didn't want to sleep with Mark Mark said he'd prefer Lenny between the two of us he'd take us both he didn't think I was ugly I was so complimented I didn't want to watch watching Lenny fuck someone and not being able to be involved wanting to would blow me Mark kept pushing Lenny telling me to go into the livingroom Lenny didn't want me there Ronny came in Bill Blass jumpsuit blue with a thin white belt Bill Blass scarf my my richies Hanky Panky crackers from Boston I ate one and didn't like it Mark wanted to go back to the livingroom I wanted to get out of there back to the

cats I prefer gay guys because I'm not under pressure constantly to fuck them watch if my clothing's always closed which it's not I was feeling anomalous Mark started saying the mattress in the waterbed on the waterbed is torn I have to fix it he even threaded a real needle Lenny can you help me Ronny's cracking ridiculous jokes Mark's done it so often he even has it timed Mark says you can watch Ronny's not a voyeur we watch Rat-Race Debbie Schmereynolds an incredibly creepy flie in which Debbie's a good girl who'd rather give up her guy than prostitute I don't remember if she's living with him in sin it was very romantic Ronny and I were finally talking Johnny Carson turned on crude gags about hookers drag queens everyone's one for fun I'm finding out about middle America the whole place is mad I'm cold to Lenny not admitting that I am which is nasty I want to see my cats Mark has one Tiffany she's 7 weeks pregnant and crawls through almost closed window no one else comes it was a party not even Mickey Mark said that Mickey would be very upset if he knew that Mark slept with anyone else Mark would if Mickey did it's quite nutty there's this rich guy Jack who's been supporting Mark still is? they have an expensive looking place not much furniture yet no books of course we're open for any garbage I get pissed off when Mark kisses me and calls me a girl he's upset I am I try to relax rub him goodnight Lenny's acting like he's lost his mind we get a ride with this dope seller creep doesn't know why anyone would live in a commune not enough money to the 8th street subway this is my first dream sequence 1:17 I have to go out for the rest of the day get my hair cut again thank god show this to Lenny he'll like it sleep with him when I get home tonight Hannah? we're getting to be friends with Mark tomorrow night another plan completely confused

The text reproduced here is a 45-page typescript, numbered from 3 to 45. A xeroxed copy of the original typescript was sent to Alan Sondheim ca. February 24-28, 1974, along with Acker's second letter to him. The title was handwritten on the typescript by Acker in 1974, probably for Alan Sondheim, as suggested by the signature: "Love TBT". This version was transcribed from a digital copy.

Photocopies of part of the typescript are archived at the Fales Library.

Acker's handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to the typescript's original pagination.

The Section from DIARY was composed in New York between January and February of 1971. Acker and Neufeld had been living together there since May or June of 1970. As Acker wrote to Alan Sondheim in early March 1974, the whole diary was near 100 pages, which accounts for the word "Section" in the title.¹ It can be aptly summarized as an attempt to map at that time my total present consciousness.² It is hard to know if this is a raw text, improvised on the typewriter, or if it is a clean corrected copy composed out of manuscript diaries. Looking at how fairly clean it is, how she avoided punctuation, we chose to consider the "Diary" as a compositional object. The references inside the text to her act of writing it should thus be taken as second degree, and the feeling of immediacy they convey as artificial or beyond testimonial value. It seems Acker quickly lost interest in this text, and got maybe even embarrassed about the personal content in it;³ nevertheless, in 1974 she chose the Section from DIARY in order to show Sondheim where she came from, making it her literary starting point.

Notes:

38 1-2/71 At that time Kathy Acker was living in New York with Leonard ("Lenny") Neufeld. Acker and Neufeld had met during David Antin's poetry class, in the fall of '69, at San Diego's UCSD — within weeks they had gotten together.⁴ Lenny was married to Martha Rosler and Kathy to Bob Acker. As soon as Neufeld finished his coursework in linguistics, late May 1970, they both left for New York, moving into the big two-bedroom, \$103/month apartment on 600 West 163rd Street (at 163rd and Broadway) Neufeld had once shared with Rosler.⁵ Acker was 23 years old, he was 28.

1. A xeroxed copy of the original 100-page manuscript diary is archived in the Jerome Rothenberg Papers at UCSD; Acker had offered it to Rothenberg (cf. "Online interview with Chris Kraus", August 2017, on *Border Crossings*, online: <www.bordercrossingsmag.com/article/close-encounter-of-a-biographical-kind> [accessed on July 10, 2019]).

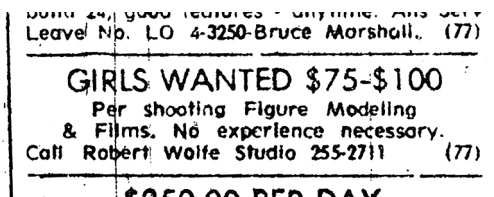
2. Second letter to Alan Sondheim, ca. February 24-28, 1974, cf. *infra*, p. 445.

3. "I can't bear to read so have never edited even reread but probably contains info about me (stuff I for one don't want to know)" (*ibid.*).

4. About Leonard and Kathy in Solana Beach around 1969-1970, see Bill Berkson's testimony about a day spent with them in February 1970: "California Letters (1969-1970)", in *The World*, n° 28, May 1973, "Autobiographical issue", pub. Poetry Project (St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, NY), ed. Anne Waldman, p. 6-9.

5. Leonard Neufeld, email to the editor, April 2, 2019.

Jerome Rothenberg and his wife Diane, both mentioned in the *DIARY*, lived on the fifth floor. Within weeks of arriving Acker was diagnosed with pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) — I was fucking sick¹ — and was taking synthetic opium to diminish the pain.² Looking through the *Village Voice* ads they found Bob Wolfe's ad for his 14th Street Studio (image: courtesy of The Rialto Report).



Acker and Neufeld perhaps performed in a dozen pornographic film loops and photo shoots at Bob Wolfe's studio (cf. *infra*, "14th Street Studio and Fun City"). In December of 1970, Bob Wolfe offered them the Sunday "live sex show" performance slot at Fun City theater, Times Square, owned by Martin J. Hodas³ (who had just hired Wolfe as manager), where they could earn \$120 a night⁴ for performing at least six shows, twenty or thirty minutes each. No one in the show had to have actual sex,⁵ unlike in the film loops, and the performers were allowed to invent their own semi-improvised scripts. With the money from this Sunday night job Acker could stay home during the week and write (Leonard Neufeld would work on weekdays at an editorial agency). They worked there three or four months, during which she kept several notebooks (cf. inventory of Kathy Acker notebooks at the Fales Library). In late March the Vice Squad raided Fun City. Leonard and Kathy were arrested for public lewdness; Bob Wolfe bailed them out the next day and the charge was eventually dismissed with a fine paid by "Marty" Hodas, but the case dragged out over several court dates. Tired of the job they got themselves fired.⁶

This "section" from *DIARY*, as the author indicated, would have been composed from materials written between January and February 1971, more or less at the same moment she and Neufeld started working at Fun City and quit acting in sex tapes. As we didn't have access to manuscript versions of this text, we can't accurately describe the process

1. Cf. Section from *Diary*, p. 61.

2. Cf. *infra*, third letter to Alan Sondheim, ca. Feb 28-March 1, 1974, p. 448.

3. He appears as "Mart", the main representative of the "Jewish Mafia" and owner of "the peep shows and the dancing girls" in *Rip-off Red, Girl Detective* (April-June 1973), Grove Press, 2002, p. 71-72.

4. Acker received \$20 per show (cf. *supra*, Section from *DIARY*, p. 41, 63). — The \$200 per week she mentions to Barry Alpert, and the going to the "sex show every day and write two pages" she tells to Sylvère Lotringer, don't seem accurate if we look closely at the *DIARY* (cf. interview of Acker by Barry Alpert in 1976 and interview by Sylvère Lotringer in 1989-1990, in Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Melville House, 2018, p. 21, 76-77).

5. In fear of the police's reaction, Bob Wolfe and Martin J. Hodas prohibited it (L. Neufeld, email to the editor, April 13, 2019).

6. Until here, unless mentioned otherwise, main source is Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 25-62.

of composition Acker followed. Nevertheless we can assume she maybe cut and pasted, shortened, corrected the expression, certainly erased punctuation marks and introduced breath-spaces. There is no substantial evidence that permits us to discard the possibility that this typescript is actually the first and unique version of these texts (independent of their use in *Politics*), but considering the rather clean state of the typescript, considering that it was xeroxed and sent to Alan Sondheim in 1974, and finally, considering that Acker seems to have typed only definitive versions of her pieces, it is probable that we are not dealing with a “raw” diary, but with a composition from a “diary.”¹ The word “Section” could thus have two meanings: 1) the present text is a rewritten excerpt from manuscript diaries, 2) this typescript is only a part of a longer typed work entitled “Diary”. This *Section from DIARY* was then possibly composed in March-April 1971 (maybe under the influence of Gerard Malanga’s diary-like poems, which Acker had heard at a reading in February) and it could have initiated a series continuing with the *Poems 5/71 – 6/71* which Acker read at the St. Mark’s Poetry Project open-mike evening on May 7, 1971.²

The text begins with the author mentioning she writes after many weeks of incapacity to do so, she had gone crazy gradual and insidious loss of memory.³ It seems she experienced a moment of extreme seclusion and started to resort to speech and repetition in order to preserve her memory and sense of continuity: talked to myself for days aloud so that I wouldn’t forget from minute to minute the train of my thought went slowly repeating each phrase three or four times so that I mustn’t lose track [...] I repeated each phrase finally getting to the area the beginning of the area?⁴ The diary form could thus have appeared as a means to continue writing in the context of an agitated period. During those two months Acker would stay at home most of the time, experimenting with language and body-mind states — almost a daily ritual-exercise. Her relation with Leonard Neufeld wasn’t going so well, as she didn’t feel loved and desired by him, rather neglected and always pushed back into a female role she abhorred: Lenny had not been listening to me been cold not wanting to fuck all week I was nagging him feeling bad that I was nagging⁵ (also cf. *infra*, “Kathy Acker and Sex Work in the *Section from DIARY*”). She also felt attracted to and in love with J. Rothenberg. Neufeld-Acker’s relation was open. He made the most of it, while she seemed to go through a transitional moment regarding her relation with her body and sexuality: I had closed off for months pretending I wanted to sleep with lots of people I was a lesbian I thought Lenny should.⁶ Without many friends besides colleagues of the sex industry, especially after Jerome Rothenberg left New York, she felt isolated, part of no social groups, fed up

1. Chris Kraus, in her biography of Acker, uses it as a raw, first-hand diary, and thus looks through it as a transparent medium, focusing on signified contents and especially — a typical hermeneutic habit with Acker’s work — what the text seems to “divulge” about Acker’s sexuality. The actual way sexuality is problematized formally into the act of writing is overlooked.

2. Cf. Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), p. 61, who knows it from the *Poems 5/71 – 6/71* itself.

3. *Section from DIARY*, p. 38.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

with masculine company and wanting to get closer to women though not knowing how: also Susana dancing trying this time to make me not Lenny I wasn't able to speak to her scared to show her feeling [...] I'm a bit scared don't want to sleep with a girl not just mechanically I keep edging away from any situation that has the remotest possibility even fantasy of becoming strong¹.

Regarding writing, she affirms being still interested in poetry and in identifying through language and symbolic conventions with criminal group.² The *Section from DIARY* continues to experiment in this vein. Though almost nothing is known so far about Acker's writings before 1971, we can imagine the experiences she was having in New York at that moment could have inspired a radical change in her practice.

this is only good if I make it true if it is a diary if I stop lying stop giving a shit about the quality [...] I'm not thinking anymore I've given up spelling syntax image [...] beginning of journey-diary through the puke lower world. the desire of the city [...] I don't want to write anymore I'll just talk forget it inspiration gone energy high general feeling in the consciousness: can't get myself together what are you doing I'm flying into outer space I'm going insane³

As it is argued in "Kathy Acker and Sex Work in the *Section from DIARY*" (cf. infra), there is a direct and complex relation between writing, the sex show and her fantasies, all of which are part of the creative performance she aims to produce. Regarding the traditional form of the diary, it seems Acker saw in it an opportunity to distance herself from literary as well as stylistic and grammatical standards. The quick, shorthand, circumstantial, not-explicit writing it authorized suited her in this sense. The form's flexibility was a perfect means to further explore and understand what she was going through, transcribing literally (copying) feelings and memories to somehow learn what they meant: What I do is, when I think I have something to learn, I start copying things because that's how I learn⁴. Yet she also took poetic advantage of the excessive truth-value attributed to feminine personal writings (as in phallographic language, the feminine pronoun always refers to the body, thus to real naked life experience) to transform the medium into a literary performance of the consciousness's experiential processes, weaving fantasies and sensations into a new syntax. We should therefore take Acker seriously when she turned down Jerome Rothenberg's offer to show her works to someone at Dial Press, because [I'd] have to stress the 42nd Street shit that's only 1 part and is NOT what my writing's about⁵.

1. *Section from DIARY*, p. 41, p. 57.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

3. *The Burning Bombing of America: The Destruction of the U.S.*, spring 1972, Grove Press, 2002, p. 157-158.

4. Informal interview of Acker by R. J. Ellis, Carolyn Bird, Dawn Curwen, Ian Mancor, Val Ogden, and Charles Patrick, on April 23, 1986; pub. in Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Melville House, 2018, p. 31.

5. Letter to Jerome Rothenberg (Jerome Rothenberg Papers, MSS 10, Spec. Coll., UCSD Library), quoted in Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 61.



Black and white photograph of a film shoot, at Neufeld and Acker's apartment (600 W, 163rd Street, NY), in late 1971-early 1972. Leonard Neufeld in the bed with an unidentified actress, and in the doorway a friend of hers "just keeping her company" (according to Neufeld, email to the editor, April 2, 2019). Photograph: © Laurence (Larry) Fink (then, a friend of Acker and Neufeld).

38 Susana Leonard Neufeld identified some of the people mentioned through the Section from DIARY:

- Susana – performer in the live sex show.
- Charlie – Charlie Morrow, a friend and musician, composer, performance artist.
- Josie – performer in porn films with Acker and Neufeld.
- Armand – Armand Schwerner, a poet and friend.
- L. Hornick – Lita Hornick, wealthy avant-garde art patron. They were at her apartment for parties once or twice.
- Mark – porn actor Mark Stevens.
- Julia – Neufeld's mother.
- Vicki – Neufeld's sister.
- Elizabeth – Acker and Neufeld's cat (also called Lizard, Lizzy).
- Amy – a porn actor.
- Toni – a porn actor.
- Paul – Acker and Neufeld's cat
- Mickey – Mark's boyfriend.
- Clorinda – Jackson Mac Low's daughter (spelled Clarinda), a little girl at that time.
- Melvin – Melvin Freilicher, a close friend of Acker in San Diego.
- Burt – Burt Lasky (ran an editorial agency).
- Hannah – poet Hannah Weiner.
- Josie – a porn actor.

39+56 I spend two hours masturbating Here masturbation is mainly just described as an activity, it doesn't enter too much into the writing, but importantly it's always linked with the act of writing: I hope that I'm not writing too much spent the last hour masturbating. Later we'll get whole architectures that gush and unfold, like here in 1996's *Pussy King of the Pirates*:

[...] open to being a rose; a rose unfolds again and again until the nerves drive the flesh into pure nerves; they are—I'm closing again (becoming rigid) – these are the rhythms of the labyrinth. / "The vibrations (pleasure) are taking over. Now any desire to stop..... oh yes, there it goes"

In Acker's 1982 essay in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*,² she's already several years into her work on/ with the texts of the French author Pierre Guyotat, notorious for masturbating while he writes.³ She begins the essay with notes on Guyotat's writing practice, ingesting his

1. Kathy Acker, *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, New York: Grove, 1996, p. 34.

2. Kathy Acker, "The Invisible Universe," *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, n° 4, 1982.

3. Acker's relationship with the French writer Pierre Guyotat is something I'll get back to in the notes for the texts that Acker starts writing around 1972, after she leaves New York and moves to San Diego with Peter Gordon. We know that she's definitely working with Guyotat in November 1979, when she stays in Gérard-Georges Lemaire's apartment, and subjectively translates his copy of Guyotat's 1970 book *Éden Éden Éden*. These translations will then be cut into the first part of *Great Expectations*. But maybe she was reading Guyotat as early as 1970 or 1971, when *Éden Éden Éden* first came out, because as editor Amy Scholder writes in the very brief note introducing *Rip-off Red* and *The Burning Bombing of America*:

words and simultaneously showing and telling her method. Acker doing Guyotat ventriloquism: "For me the sexual desire has always been bound to this savage desire to write. I write as I masturbate. On the other hand, there's a text of notes, a huge mass of notes, the learned text. Just as my day begins around 9:00 AM and ends at 2:00 AM [...], so one text is inserted into this time circle in a regular manner and then another. I don't write; I type. I mechanically insert one text into another text. Mechanically meaning musically."¹ Masturbation marks time and rhythm in Guyotat, and Acker takes this but fems it, giving us this mix of nipples and cats and cum and fur in this diary text, and later the images of roses and labyrinth. Back to the 1982 essay: after regurgitating Guyotat, Acker runs through multiple places, voices, texts, characters, from Daddy to Winnie the Pooh. While time shifts we can think that what's constant is the feeling of drawing masturbation out through time. The subject comes to unity (haha) through continual masturbation as identity practice. [cf]

42 want presents The claim for presents and the image of the neglected child, whose parents forget to give any presents to, recur through Acker's writings.² This feeling of being neglected by people whose attention she is longing for is assumed by Acker as somehow obsessive and possibly in contradiction with reality: **no one's bought me presents since I was ten an obvious lousy lie but I think at the same time it's true³ or: can't like the present I get then feel guilty I don't like the present⁴**. The choice to give equal credit to what she thinks or feels, despite whatever she knows, is characteristic of Acker's strategy to sabotage objectivity's foundations, and so the foundations of identity. The longing for presents, as she herself suggests, even influenced the Santa Claus⁵ skit she used to perform with Leonard at Fun City: she introduced the theme in the show by talking about how I got fucked up because Santa Claus screwed me⁶.

42 brain-washed In Acker's writings "brain-washing" is closely associated to other key notions of her vocabulary: "robot" and "lobotomy". They are used to characterize a life imprisoned by 8 hours/day jobs, lack of will and control, dependency (economic, sexual), sanity as a norm, social pressure, lifestyle of the masses, superficial

"The Burning Bombing of America was probably written a year earlier, in 1972, after Pierre Guyotat's *Eden Eden Eden*." (Kathy Acker, *Rip-off Red Girl Detective and the Burning Bombing of America*, New York: Grove Press, 2002).

1. "The Invisible Universe," p. 84.

2. On the same subject, cf. *infra*, *Portraits*, editorial note for p. 114.

3. Section from *DIARY*, p. 41.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

5. According to Kraus, in this skit "she played a patient confessing her sexual Santa Claus fantasies to her aroused psychoanalyst"; she deduces this from a passage in *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*: "In one of the acts in my sex show I become a young woman who is talking to a psychiatrist. I tell the psychiatrist how Santa Claus fell out of the chimney told me I should always be a good girl I talk baby talk I should always do what he tells me I slowly start taking off my blouse and rubbing my right hand over my right breast, I have to believe in Santa Claus" (feat. in *Portrait of an Eye*, Grove Press, 1998, p. 53). But it may as well have been a scene about a little girl waiting for Santa Claus and his presents, he comes "right into my room I'm taking my clothes my shoes off rubbing my breasts" (Section from *DIARY*, p. 83).

6. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

relationships. The terms are usually opposed to: free-willed, tough, hysterical, weird, creep, singular, schizophrenic, capable of absorption in the other. The word “lobotomy” can also be understood in the context of Acker’s long-standing hate for doctors, figures of biopolitics and masculine domination throughout her writings. The fear of becoming a “robot” could also be inscribed in a (fantasized) childhood’s memory/time: I’m forced to enter the worst of my childhood nightmares, the world of lobotomy: the person or people I depend on will stick their fingers into my brain, take away my brain, my driving will-power, I’ll have nothing left, I won’t be able to manage for myself.¹ The longing to want freely and the fear of being brainwashed by someone thing are connected by Acker to the feelings she encounters in the love-sex space;² indeed, in the 1971 work, love-sex seems to be a place where she is most sensitive to all tentatives of domination, but where she also categorizes several of her most important fantasies, such as going beyond top-bottom sexuality.

43 everyone hates me Recurrent theme in Acker’s writings. In the 1971-1974 texts looked at here, hate mostly 1) comes from her toward: herself, her body, men, all people; 2) comes from the women, men or all people in general toward: her, her body; 3) comes from her lovers toward her; 4) comes from her parents toward her (and combines here with Acker’s narrators’ conviction of having been unwanted children).³ But hate, instead of being exterior, enclosing the narrator into the identity it delimits for her, appears instead to be a mechanism by which she can alienate herself, becoming the “hated.” Assuming this marginal position allows her to confront others’ discomfort in front of her said “weirdness” with the supposed aggressiveness and shamelessness of the hated. She can pretend to be a character who has nothing to lose: I know I’m going to overreact, no one I like will like me, I try to hide my feelings by acting like a sex maniac [...] I chase the person, I’m vulnerable, I act as tough as possible to cover my vulnerability⁴.

44 Ariadne’s thread Ariadne’s thread Ariadne is a main figure in Acker’s key 1995 feminist essay “Moving into Wonder,” where she uses Ariadne, Theseus, and the story of the labyrinth to say that capital A Art and its related way of taking about time is historically based on the domination of women. Acker starts her story with Apollo’s rape of Daphne. This in turn unleashes a whole era in which creation is linked to domination, control, and definition of boundaries. Alternative creation, according to Acker, is made of physical imagination, illustrated for her by dance. Doomed to live in this shitty Apollo-era, Ariadne helps Theseus get through the labyrinth because she’s crazy for him. Acker uses this to show how that kind of relationship as it is recast in myth (female-desperate-giving and male-asshole-hero), reinforces existing versions of time and action. While we’re still stuck in this way of thinking and doing, we can’t access other languages, or a way of creating outside of patriarchal dominance. Acker in “Moving into Wonder”:

1. *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*, feat. in *Portrait of an Eye*, Grove Press, 1998, p. 53; cf. also p. 5, 6, 8, 20, 61.

2. Section from *DIARY*, p. 67. The spatial metaphor is hers.

3. Cf. Section from *DIARY*, p. 42; *The Childlike Life...*, op. cit., p. 16, 24, 36, 41, 43.

4. *The Childlike Life...*, op. cit., p. 16.

If Daedalus was the first artist, art began out of division. The word art began to be used as soon as there was a separation between imagination and state.

Prior to Apollo's rape of Daphne and to Apollo's reign, there was no such division. When Daphne and the Maenads danced, imagination became actual.

The labyrinth, that construction of Daedalus's, covered up the origin of art. Covered up the knowledge that art was, and so is, born out of rape or the denial of women and born out of political hegemony.

One form of Daedalus's construction is time. When time is understood as linear, there is no escape. No escape for us out of the labyrinth. I said that the labyrinth has been built.

But time is not only linear. Unlike Ariadne, for we do not hold Theseus as our lover, let us, by changing the linearity of time, deconstruct the labyrinth and see what the women who are in its center are doing. Let us see what is now central.¹

Acker's feminism needs to be studied. In her 1988 interview with Ellen Freidman, Friedman describes Acker's work as "overtly" feminist (they're talking here after the release of *Don Quixote*, which is the most obviously feminist of Acker's fiction texts).² While she's often talked about now as a feminist icon, or maybe a post-feminist punk icon, that definitely wasn't the case when *Blood and Guts...* came out. In a 1984 review of *Blood and Guts...* in the *New York Times*, Roy Hoffman writes, "But there's a deep moral dislocation in [B&G] the novel, which devotes thousands of words to depicting the cruelty inflicted on Janey and on women in general, is itself abusive toward women. There are beatings, rapes, psychological torture, and more energy is spent laying out these abuses than in defusing or counteracting them. And Janey's descent, as victim, into becoming the perfect image of all her oppressors want her to be is not so much harrowing as pathetic."³ [CF]

45 **green room** The green room serves to evoke the childhood home. We find the same details about it in other texts, for example: I'm lying in bed in a dark green room a slim bed next to the wall⁴.

46 **Jerry leaving** According to Kraus, Jerome Rothenberg left New York in January 1971 for a Visiting Regents' Professorship in San Diego.⁵

1. Kathy Acker, "Moving into Wonder," *Bodies of Work*, London: Serpent's Tail, 1997, p. 97.

2. Ellen G. Friedman, "A Conversation with Kathy Acker," *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 9.3, 1989.

3. Roy Hoffman, "In Short: Blood and Guts in High School," *The New York Times*, 23 December, 1984, <www.nytimes.com/1984/12/23/books/in-short-177874.html>, [accessed: 31 July, 2019].

4. *Rip-off Red, Girl Detective* (April-June 1973), Grove Press, 2002, p. 57.

5. Cf. Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), p. 30.

53 **blackout** On February 7, 1971, an explosion at Consolidated Edison's 40th Street plant in Manhattan caused a four-hour blackout in several areas including Time Square. During the event Kathy Acker thought it had been caused by a Weather Underground bomb.

60 **something pleases me about putting trivial incidents down as they happen one by one** This is finding pleasure in converting one's life into poetic material, or in using that conversion as a key to blurring the autobiography-"real" fiction divide. This whole diary form can be read as a commentary on autobiography, a stab at perfecting the material that crucially READS as autobiographical in the soon-to-be written experiments with identity. Pieces like *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula...* function because their mix of material that the reader identifies as autobiography (perhaps precisely where it seems the most trivial) clashes against material that definitely can't be from Kathy Acker's real life: "I'm born in the late autumn or winter of 1827" or "I'm born poor St. Helen's, Isle of Wight. 1790." Or "I have the chance to put to the guillotine my mother-in-law who had been the primary cause of my imprisonment; but I don't."

At the same time, there's that visible pleasure in making with "undignified" material, the trivial material of girl-life, which is key to feminist experimental writing practice. I hear proto-reverberations of Bernadette Mayer's 1982 *Midwinter Day*, which is all about creating a form out of organizing experience as it happens through time. As Mayer writes: "Don't take what I say too seriously / Or too lightly, / I'm sorry, / Nevermind / I was just playing around, I'm trying to find / What I guess I'd rather not know consciously / I'd like to know / What kind of person I must be to be a poet / I seem to wish to be you".¹ Trivial details are unserious and unserious writing isn't the writing of a poet so maybe to be a poet you have to live a serious life, somehow purge your whole environment of the trivial. A feminist experimental writing practice holds that this division between the serious and the trivial is ridiculous. It's just another version of the structural domination of women, as maintained through the coding of what counts as art, which Acker takes on in her essay "Moving into Wonder," discussed in the note above (cf. supra). Anyone who is or who's been a girl probably has had that experience of writing in a diary and being told or convinced that whatever it is you're doing isn't writing but just some girl shit, because private, small, selfish, not interesting, not art. Acker's early diary work gives us an Epic of girl-diary literary genre. [CF]

61 **Malanga** The poet Gerard Malanga. He performed a reading along with Patti Smith on Wednesday February 10, 1971, at St. Mark's Poetry Project.² He published the collection *Chic Death* in 1971 with Pym-Randall (Cambridge, Massachusetts) illustrated by reproductions of *The Death Paintings* series by Andy Warhol; he may have read materials from this work on that night.

62 **the angels** This passage refers to a dream Kathy Acker had, cf. supra, p. 65.

1. Bernadette Mayer, *Midwinter Day*, Berkeley, CA: Turtle Island, 1982.

2. Cf. *The Readings List – Readings & Events at the St. Mark's Poetry Project, 1966-1980*, document available on the Poetry Project website.

63 I don't want anything to do with sex Kathy Acker later amplified this reflexion in *New York City* in 1979:

Janey replies, "I'm not fucking anymore cause sex is a prison. It's become a support of this post-capitalist system like art. Businessmen who want to make money have to turn up a product that people'll buy and want to keep buying. Since American consumers now own every object there is plus they don't have any money anyway cause they're being squeezed between inflation and depression, just like fucking, these businessmen have to discover products that obvious necessity sells. Sex is such a product. Just get rid of the puritanism sweetheart your parents spoonfed you in between materialism which the sexual revolution did thanks to free love and hippies sex is a terrific hook. Sexual desire is a naturally fluctuating phenomena. The sex product presents a naturally expanding market. Now capitalists are doing everything they can to bring world sexual desire to an unbearable edge.

69 Stein collection The Museum of Modern Art in New York gathered Gertrude Stein's art collection from all over the world and exhibited it between December 19 through March 1, 1971.

81 Paul's sucking on his nipple Let's follow the cat sex. The cats are everywhere in this text. They become part of narrator's body and ooze into her environment, defining her skin as resolutely diffuse, alien, animal, sexy; more fur and slime than the classical human-animal boundary seems to permit. New Narrative writer Dodie Bellamy writes about her own cats in a text that mirrors this one of Acker's: "Claw clippings scattered across my comforter, litter in my sheets, he kneads my tit with his paws, he pokes my tit with his snout. She nuzzles in my armpit, she nuzzles in my neck, he burrows between my legs and sleeps there, he sits between my legs with the top half of him resting on my belly, she perches on my abdomen and licks her asshole."¹ (Dodie Bellamy, "Blanche and Stlaney" from *Academonia*, 2006). The link between Acker and Bellamy isn't at all random; Acker was part of the social and literature scene that was influential in the development of New Narrative writing in San Francisco, for the writers that were about a half generation younger than her. Bellamy was part of Robert (Bob) Glück's writing workshop at Small Press Traffic, largely remembered as the central hub where New Narrative as a definable movement was named and flourished. Glück: "Our interest in Dennis Cooper and Kathy Acker produced allegiances and friendships with those writers. Kathy moved to San Francisco in the fall of 1981; while getting settled she stayed with Denise Kastan, who lived downstairs from me. Denise and I co-directed Small Press Traffic. Kathy was at work on *Great Expectations*. In fact, Denise and I appear in it; we are the whores Danella and Barbarella."² [CF]

1. Dodie Bellamy, "Blanche and Stanley," *Academonia*, San Francisco: Krupskaya, 2006.

2. Robert Glück, "Long Note on New Narrative," *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*, ed. Mary Burger et al., Toronto: Coach House Books, 2004.



Black and white photograph of a film shoot, at Neufeld and Acker's apartment (600 W, 163rd Street, NY), in late 1971-early 1972. In the bed is Leonard Neufeld with an unidentified actress, in front of them is the cameraman. Photograph: © Laurence (Larry) Fink.



83 **personality changes** *This kind of experience would become for Acker deeply associated with sex work, particularly stripping, as she told Barry Alpert in 1976: like when I was a stripper and did performances — I almost change personality, it's a really strong experience. And it's all right except that I don't do it that easily, it's too strong an experience*¹. Even later she uses the same verb “flip out” to say how necessary it was for her to write at that moment: I would have an hour in between each show. So I would go to Tad's Steakhouse and I would write. Just to keep my mind together, otherwise I would have flipped out².

86 **Rat-Race** *Rat-Race is a 1960 American drama film directed by Robert Mulligan, starring Debbie Reynolds and Tony Curtis.*

1. Interview with Barry Alpert, at Mitali Restaurant (New York City), for *Only Paper Today*, March 30, 1976; pub. in Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, ed. and introduction by Amy Scholder and Douglas A. Martin, Melville House, 2018, p. 14.

2. Interview of Acker by Sylvere Lotringer (“Devoured by Myths”), unexpurgated transcript, 1989-1990, in *ibid.*, p. 77.

Portraits

kathy acker

(7/1971)

P O R T R A I T S **III**

7 / 71

Kathy Acker

[1] I called Harriet telling her I had received a call from Acker collect Lenny answered Acker said hello pigeon Acker insulted him said let me speak to Kathy I took the phone he said that lousy bastard he told the phone company that Melvin had made a phony credit card call to your house and he gave the phone company my and Jan's name I don't know what you're talking about the phone company called Wilma today and said Melvin Freilicher had called you on a phony credit card number I told you in a letter they had called me over a month ago I said I didn't know what they were talking about some people had been staying at my house at that time and I don't know what they were doing do I remember any of their names well Bob Acker I'm not talking about that incident I have no idea what you're talking about also Lenny called up Martha behind my back and told her she wasn't bringing up Joshua properly I want the 20 dollars you owe me for the divorce I want it now

butterflies come from out of my fingers red walls sparrows as I [2]
can feel the inside flowing butterflies come out of my dirty feet
and my arm hair they come out of my mouth as I try to talk out
of my hair which is curly and orange out of my purple and blue
neck which has been placed in the clouds out of my vagina out of
my sex which remains unknown of my mouth and nose which I'd
condemned and call beautiful

- [4] I was in a large hall we came in through the back to get dinner we walked for a while to a table where the dinner was which a matron was already taking away I think I was with a man and there was a murder involved there were one bowl with buttered boiled green cabbage one with meat and one with potatoes on the table as she was lifting the cabbage up I said let me have some first she said where's your meal ticket I couldn't find it I looked in my wallet and even my identity card was missing I showed her my belongings and found a slip of paper with cash register figures on it which I thought proved I was a student I thought the man I was after the murderer or whatever he was had gotten my identification cards either I ate dinner or I said to the matron let's go to my room to see if I can find my cards we were in my room one room among many rooms in a building with many floors there were wood walls an L shaped room to the left of the smaller section of the L was a bed with a green blanket on it not made up to the right a light wood desk no hangings or pictures a naked or a plain glass chandeliered light bulb I looked through my belongings I couldn't find the cards he or she said look the position of your a black object shaped like a camera case shows that you've been searched I thought she was right there were many doors in the long part of the L but they were securely locked I looked over the bed and saw a small trapdoor in the wall I opened it a young boy in yellowish pajamas his knees pressed up against the wall fell out I was frightened and said what shall we do with him he got up and ran out one of the doors I went over to the long part of the room to see if all the doors could be locked my companion
- [5] might have been a man or have disappeared the room was on the ground floor the walls were mainly doors opening to the street the doors at first looked secure the room looked more luxurious than

before the walls were dark blue the more I examined the doors the more open and unlockable they looked men kept running through them the murderer might have come in and was definitely going to be able to get in for good I was more and more terrified

[6] my mother said we should go out to the park I was dressed in my school uniform a navy wool jumper and white middy blouse or in a pinafore a large rimmed navy hat I must have been home from some kind of school I took a pink ball in my hand my sister in my parents' bedroom on a counter like a lunch counter across from a chest covered with mirrors showed me the money my mother had given her or it was my mother showing me her money one hundred and fifty dollar bills she gave me a fifty dollar bill I said that's more than I can earn in a week I thought they were very rich I had to go to the bathroom we were standing around the dining room table which is at the end of the hall it was a large space and I could barely see the dark green of the walls my mother said go here pointing to a record chair spindly wire legs and frame the seat was a wooden box and a record player frame with a plush green pad I thought it couldn't be a toilet and couldn't find anywhere for the piss to go I sat on it decided I'd flush it some of the piss splattered up on my face and body as it was swirling I was in the elevator my mother and sister were on the 160th floor my mother said this elevator takes so long we were passing the 50th floor I thought it was moving very smoothly and fast she said the Goldings live here I knew they were rich which was why my mother mentioned them and bothered to try to be friends.

a woman with long brown hair its texture is fine as if it were fabric it reaches below her shoulders never curling she wears it straight or up fastened to the other hair with a large barrette her face is thin and long she uses it as a clown's face weirdly grinning showing appreciation getting usually irritated looking upset crazy bowler hats and gypsy wigs Indian men running through her pieces old statues from white paste and black velvet her organ awakes at midnight and starts to bleep and chortle onk onk jewels pregnant cats friendly women become terrifying events of Vietnam and unholy Mafia takeover her black bitchy cat sits on her head covers her head with her black witch hair walks out to the middle of the floor and cries spraaa spraaa sings louder and moves away above the street

[2]

[3] no sight of the sun but huge smoke poison clouds gatherings
of black and silver air a thin gum and hot liquid noise so loud
it can't be heard louder than the cats the thick gold halo gathe-
rings of golden perfumes old white long dresses and whiter hands
an entrance into a new world and reorder silence grains fruits
vegetables huge belly white except for the black-grey long growing
nipples my lap a garden two huge cocks smaller ones twisting
around the skin the fur is black and white not very thick the smell
varies from sweet to bitter and salty two jewels lie at the base of
the feet translucent sapphire fur

caress of skin soft fur and lips green and red around a curve
of yellow blue and red crescents within the white silky cloth of
a short Chinese robe against the skin rice with mustard seeds
nutmeg salt coconut bulghur a few grains of pepper seaweed fish
outside sheets of rain surprisingly cool air good stomach a few
nightmares scenes of daily sleepy life two cats one pregnant and
one horny a long vinegar bath finishing a strange book Sherwood
Anderson about sex about all kinds of sex white and dark animals
dancing against dark air and small fires rain falling new times eat
a little and jewels

[4]

[5] in the country I'd have sex with everyone I met who I liked and who likes me I'd be with people all the time I wouldn't be scared of people I didn't show very well and I wouldn't have fantasies about friends hurting my feelings stealing from me denying the love for me they had already shown taking my other friends away forming small intimate groups and excluding me I was scared of Meredith because she has power and acts unpredictably in her liking me she avoids me she talks casually she'll ask me an intimate question and then turn away before I answer or before she replies she is a strong artist interested in the imaginative and religious workings of the mind she has not talked with me about her work or my work or about anything at length she feels interested in me and wary of being close

she has fuzzy yellow-white hair the strands are invisible a high hair-line makes her hair stand up and her head look shaved she is 5'5" slight but not thin a beautiful face strong thin bones high cheek-bones not like a model with hollow cheeks but rounded the flesh seems thick and soft small facial features blue eyes partly curled nose a light pink oval shaped mouth a small protruding chin she looks calm and possibly sure of herself dressed in men's blue clothes she talks to another woman taller and thinner with curling yellow hair they might be lovers they way they talk to each other and walk about 20 minutes later I see them sitting apart the second woman sitting about two feet down the grass slope in front of the first woman who is talking to someone else I look repeatedly at the first woman feeling that she is very beautiful she doesn't notice my looks

[6]

- [7] I haven't been able to adjust my energy to living in the morning and outside I don't want to fuck Lenny though on one level I want to meet new women my sex has expanded into all my actions and thoughts and is not as strong as usual I have no ideas what my dreams have been and have had few fantasies I don't know whether I am in or out of touch with myself what was surface and depth before now is pure surface and I talk to other women about my living and feelings as I talk about crocheting and working with leather I have not talked to Lenny though I have been with him a good deal I haven't been with Meredith's group for I would have been an outsider and I feel uncomfortable with the heavily feminine role playing of a large part of the group I like Meredith and feel unable to talk to her

she tried her best to kill me and to make me into nothing she [8]
promised gifts or rewards and then forgot her promises her
actions depended on her moods and not on anything I did and
her moods changed rapidly child friend enemy authoritarian ghost
she was happiest being treated as a child and being waited on she
wanted to have money or power which she didn't have she tried to
not give me toys clothes later to stop me from doing what I wan-
ted to do and to make me die I thought that she didn't like me
because of certain ways I was acting or because of what I thought
but she disliked me for deeper and more irradicable reasons she
hated me when I was alone she hated me when I had boyfriends
she hated my schooling she hated me when I got married separa-
ted she had hated me probably as soon as I was born but hadn't
had the guts to get rid of me or give me away

[9] I was in a large house I was renting from an old alcoholic woman who was still living in the house I was in my bedroom with my boyfriend fucking right behind the landlady's room and slightly above it a small staircase about eight stairs led to my room there was a mystery involved I had been working in the same room for a lawyer or I was running a poetry magazine and picking up more work my boyfriend was leaving me he had left another girl who had been murdered we were standing in the tiny landing outside the door to my bedroom or I was looking for another boyfriend and was standing with him outside the room it was he I was making love with I came down to the hall in front of the landlady's room she came out and was nice she kept wanting to tell me something and I knew it was unpleasant because she was hedging I could hear rain falling outside the house the landlady had bright red-orange curled hair too much lipstick and many wrinkles in her face she was fairly fat about 50 or 60 years old I could tell she was drunk again I got angry I'm going to go away unless you say directly what you want to say I don't want to hear you my friend was bothered by the noise you made fucking she heard you say o o I'll love you forever there's only a thin wall between her room and yours her friend came out of her room which was backing on the landlady's room I remembered the love-making I hadn't said those words I was glad I was standing up for myself you have no right to say that I can fuck if I want she's always like this when she's drunk and it's raining I decided I could find another apartment the landlady said it was raining and I should stay I should avoid her when she was like this she was leaving to go drinking with her friend upstairs

above my room my sister lived we started climbing up the stairs the walls of this part of the house were light to middle dull green there was a huge dark red carpeted staircase and open room in the back of that staircase to our right opposite the landlady's room and the hall there was a landing above the first flight of stairs a stairway directly beyond the landing another stairway to our right which led to the next floor there we went into the room on the right a fairly large room about the size of my bedroom the old man who owned the house and who I worked for or who was seducing me showed us the rooms I was with my boyfriend or a strange man my sister or another person and Melvin there were large black iron bookcases in the room with gilt leather bound books then display racks with large newer books I saw mainly Modern Library Giants my boyfriend said he reads a lot I remembered unpacking the Modern Library's no he just orders everything in stock for display I noticed titles he couldn't possibly have read one title of a Russian Communist tract there might have been two large record speakers and some leather armchairs in the room we walked into the adjoining room a very large room about one and a half to two times the size of the last room I saw the large red-carpeted staircase and a huge red walled ballroom beyond there were scattered beds perhaps couches a small record player low scattered lighting I was on a double bed with Melvin I started to kiss his cock but he said no go down I moved down and put my tongue in an opening which felt like an inverted mouth the lips tightly closed on my tongue I felt strange but good the nervousness going away

[11] they are as tall as the trees outside the window thin and huge bones they make the wind we know their cloths snapping as they walk in front of the trees out of the line of trees into the open wings feathers spring out of their shoulders just beyond the thin shoulder blades curved hawk feathers and ram-fur cocks curl into their breasts and around their thighs they hold their necks and heads erect their arms bent at the elbow into 'T's' short hair cats' hair and panthers' dark fur lips parted in half with smaller lips behind those then smaller ones and smaller two muscles run down a few inches on each side of the navel and curve inward above the legs the front muscles of the upper legs turn outward from the movement especially above the knee and make the knee seem thin like a jutting bone

for 5' 3" long legs the thighs and legs like a boy's especially the shape of the calves a large high ass the chest is short a long neck with many hollows at its base large eyes and mouth a smaller straight nose and high cheekbones large cheeks short brown and very wavy hair the breasts look large from lack of firmness since I twice started and stopped taking Orthonovum there are stretch lines in the skin broad upper back and shoulders rounded from years of being a student and carrying books the width of the thigh decreases toward the knee then a thin slope to the ankle heavy callouses and splits in the heels and the rest of the soles most of the weight's in the ass and breasts the arms are muscular from carrying and kitchen work the abdominal area large from frequent infections I look like an attractive boy wear men's cotton underwear to ward off further infections and not look feminine [12]

[13] water I was crossing curved iron bars over a stone barrier over the river a small path to the left went around the stone down dirt to a dirt ledge some grass and stones I could sit on rocks with my feet in the water I either swam across the river or waded through part of it being able to step on circles of dirt leaping from one circle to another walking on a thin narrow strip of land that was mainly dirt a wind makes the grey water move slabs of wood Hudson Cement and a ferry three buoys three mounds of dirt or rock showing above the water one ferry moving from the left to the right green body black smokestack with red and white markings three-quarters way up the distant water's blue one long black line caused by heavier winds a white motorboat no top is moving toward the wood slabs in a diagonal

I've always given myself away to the man I've been living with [14]
acting as if he should make my decisions and make sure I stayed
alive becoming angry when I was very thick I was in touch with
myself only through my writing and was attackable only through
the writing I dressed in gorgeous clothes spending all my money
on clothes and books clothes I wasn't even comfortable wearing
tight elastics three inch heeled shoes shoes whose soles were too
heavy and caused huge blisters on my feet underpants that helped
me get vaginal infections red dents in the skin at the top of my
legs and an inch below my belly-button eye-makeup that made my
eyelids burn and thin badly made gyp easily breakable eye glasses
necklaces that caused rashes on my neck heavy long hair I was
very sexy and knew I could always find another man if the man I
was living with left me and if I decided I needed to

[15] the young boy with the jeweler's eye-glass in his left eye I thought I had gotten rid of I think he was one of the bad guys either started coming for me or I found upstairs in a large bed with another young boy his friend the glass in his eye became a shining light the bed turned into a large play paper-like boat looking like wood only large enough to carry two boys the shape of the two windows and top like an American western coach I thought that's how they do it it started coming down the stairs at me I opened a door of the house and ran outside about 5 people on every side of me appeared and started shooting at me or were about to kill me I knew that to go outside or into any enclosed space was a trap I ran back and was in a room trying to hang up my black nylon jumpsuit only it kept slipping off the hangar and the hangar was entangled in another hangar I finally managed to slip the shoulders into the proper grooves I went outside the green walled room to the hall I was just below the staircase against a light green or white wall next to the coat closet two boys came in through a door opposite me and had a sort of barrel pointed at me it was metal I pulled pillows and sheets against my body to protect myself I could feel the bullets the size of small balls bouncing off the pillow I realized that by covering myself I had gotten into another trap they came over to me took out a sort of saw and started slicing at my legs right below the knees there was a lot of blood

that was too heavy for her it was all girls wasn't it no she wasn't [16]
into spectator sports it might be different for me how was I feeling Lenny had said I had a cold she had been to all-boy dances it was nice the cruising was heavy Paul went on Saturday to the Flop? it was on lower Broadway there were gays of both sexes should she ask Paul about what he takes for a sore throat she didn't think it was the pollution Lenny had said I had been going in and out of air conditioned places was I depressed a cold was a way of expelling harmful thoughts feelings she hadn't been drawing for weeks she had to get off the phone Stanley left today and she got her welfare check so she has her own room to draw in she only got home at 5:00 this afternoon and there wasn't any direct sunlight left she can draw tomorrow maybe it'd be best if she saw me on Saturday but if I'm still sick tomorrow she'll come up she's gotten out of touch with herself she couldn't ask Paul what to take for a sore throat because he's in the kitchen cooking she'll call me tomorrow and tell me about the party Saturday night

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The text reproduced here is a 21-page typescript (partially numbered), archived at the New York University's Fales Library & Special Collections, Kathy Acker Notebooks, Mss 434 – Box 3 – Folder 6.

At the Fales, the folder bears the name: “[Lesbian] ‘Portraits’”.

The pages don’t seem to have an order, though 5 bear numbers: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6. We put those five in the beginning, in numerical order. The other pages follow as arranged in the folder.

This version was transcribed from a digital copy.

Acker’s handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Numbers in the interior margin, when in italics, correspond to Acker’s pagination; when in roman, correspond to our pagination.

Notes.

111 Meredith Probably refers to artist Meredith Monk.

114 she tried The “she” here seems to refer to the “mother” figure.

114 promised gifts Comparable to statements in other texts: My mother, my father, my two older sisters, my younger sister, and my brother often ignore me, or promise to love me, give me a present, then don’t; and I cry.¹ And further: [My mother] promises me presents and forgets to give me anything, she remembers to forget she plans to forget; she gives birth to me because she can’t get abortion.²

120 in touch with myself The expression comes back in *Portraits and Visions* (#7) with “drawing” as the medium (cf. *infra*, p. 128). Be it through drawing or writing, this practice of “being in touch with herself” can be compared to what Luce Irigaray in 1975 calls woman’s “auto-affection” [French: *auto-affection*] made possible by a new feminine syntax. Get in touch with herself for a woman would mean articulating language with feminine desire, sex, as independently as possible of the patriarchal omniscient discursive economy of the “Same and the One” male-scale, where the feminine is affected only by and for the masculine. For Irigaray, all writing should interrogate its hierarchical relation to sexual difference in order not to remain an instrument of production in the economy of subjection and property.³ But speaking-woman [*parler-femme*], if possible, isn’t speaking about men or women, isn’t a meta-language, it should be a “‘syntax’ where there would be no more subject nor object, the ‘one’ wouldn’t be given advantage anymore, there would be no more proper meaning, given name, proper attributes... This ‘syntax’ would rather bring into play proximity, but such proximity as it would make any discrimination of identity impossible, as well as any constitution of belonging, thus

1. *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*, 1st installment (June 1973), in *Portrait of an Eye, Three Novels*, Grove Press, 1998, p. 3.

2. *Ibid.*, 3rd installment (July 1973), p. 31.

3. Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un*, “Questions” (transcription of a seminar at Toulouse in March 1975), éd. Minuit (Paris), 1977, p. 129, 130-131.

any form of appropriation.”¹ She further affirms that this syntax is especially necessary to resolve the mystery of the relation between girl and mother in the childhood preceding the oedipian complex, largely ignored by psychoanalysis.

Another possibly useful concept to re-read Acker’s works is Irigaray’s “mimesis.” According to her, women are torn between their desire and a language learned at home, at school, in society, which doesn’t permit them to speak. Mimesis is thus the practice of reproducing a language which is not theirs, the masculine language; they caricature it, deform it, they “lie” and “get wrong”.² One way to understand Acker could be to interpret her writing as a tentative to follow this mimicking of major languages, this “erroneous” speaking of dominant male literary traditions and words, until they start to alter themselves, collapse and become qualitatively different.

108+120 in touch with myself We were both thinking of French feminist writing here! I like that you’re talking about Luce Irigaray, who will be especially important for the later work, *Empire of the Senseless* and after. Acker famously talks about her work beginning with *Empire* as moving away from more manual-inspired cut-up or piracy methods, and moving to a more internally driven process, writing fiction and myth that comes “from her” and not from someone else. Her attraction to Irigaray makes a lot of sense for that project, because Irigaray’s all about getting out of the “phallogocentric” (phallus-based psychic and semiotic economy) negation of all that is female (aka, female exists only in relation to male). In Acker’s reading of Irigaray, the feminist method is to go toward the not-yet-described female, which is not nothing, but instead a kind of accumulative doubling: huge, layered, mutating, non-homogenous, mythic. Acker gives her reading of Irigaray in the 1986 essay “Colette,” where she reads Colette through an interpretation of Irigaray, in order to define “myth” – both in Colette, and, we can imagine, in her writing to come. The definition that she lands on is weird, textured, made in explicit resistance to being repeatedly told by men that her ideas are wrong: “Finally, rather than submitting to their rigid mono-language, Colette shut up. In her silence she created her own kingdom, THE PRESBYTERY, her multilanguage of multieverything, herself, as ruler, magical female writer. / This, for me, is the myth of Colette.”³ The readings of Irigaray that Acker uses to get there:

Luce Irigaray in *Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un* says that according to the dis-course of the (male) world, female sexuality is “‘lack,’ ‘atrophy’ (of the sexual organ), and ‘penis envy,’ the penis being the only sexual organ of

1. Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un*, “Questions” (transcription of a seminar at Toulouse in March 1975), éd. Minit, 1977, p. 132 (our translation). “Cela dit, ce que serait une syntaxe du féminin, ce n’est pas simple, ni aisé à dire, parce que dans cette ‘syntaxe’ il n’y aurait plus ni sujet ni objet, le ‘un’ n’y serait plus privilégié, il n’y aurait plus de sens propre, de nom propre, d’attributs ‘propres’... Cette ‘syntaxe’ mettrait plutôt en jeu le proche, mais un si proche qu’il rendrait impossible toute discrimination d’identité, toute constitution d’appartenance, donc toute forme d’appropriation.”

2. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

3. Kathy Acker, “Colette,” in *Bodies of Work*, London: Serpent’s Tail, 1997 (1985), p. 156.

recognized value” In such a world the young Colette was the perfect female author: nonexistent.

Even more significant is the implied connection of writing to sexuality, and thus to identity.¹

and

Sexuality is central. Female sexuality is not negative. “Woman “touches herself” all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within her self, she is already two—but not divisible into one(s)—that caress each other.” Female sexuality not only exists, it is double: it is the toucher and the touched. Likewise, Colette’s speech was double: her I/eye looked at/ created her I/eye.

More precisely: who was this non-Oedipal I?²

So it looks like Acker is using Irigaray to get to a non-negative, generative practice of writing – hat is going to happen with and through myth.

But in terms of the actual style of these portraits, they reminded more of the French author and lesbian theorist, Monique Wittig. Especially in p. 104: flowing butterflies come out of my dirty feet... placed in the clouds out of my vagina out of my sex which remains unknown of my mouth and nose which I’d condemned and call beautiful which, with its mash-up of lists of nature things and body parts all ending in the final inversion of the world through a beautiful vagina, reminds me of Wittig’s book Les Guérillères. Les Guérillères, a fragmented and non-narrative text that takes us through an all-female post-apocalyptic world and the war that got them there, was published in French in 1969 and translated into English in 1971. So it was totally in the air, whether Acker read it or not. We do know that Acker definitely read Wittig later. In the video of her 1986 interview with Angela McRobbie at the ICA in London, Acker says that she only reads “really good literature” “like Monique Wittig or Claude Simon.”³ And she took several notes in the margins of Wittig’s essay “The Trojan Horse,” in her copy of the 1992 Wittig book of essays, The Straight Mind. We can’t know when exactly Acker wrote those notes in the margins; I came across them in 2018, at the exhibition on Acker’s work “GET RID OF MEANING” at the Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe, Germany,⁴ where the curators had brought thousands of Acker’s books from the Kathy Acker Reading Room in Cologne. Wittig writes “[...] as soon as something is written it must have a meaning. Even

1. Kathy Acker, “Colette,” in *Bodies of Work*, London: Serpent’s Tail, 1997 (1985), p. 154.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

3. Angela McRobbie interview with Kathy Acker at the ICA London, 1986. Archived on the ICA’s website, on the page for the 2019 exhibition organized around Acker’s work, “I, I, I, I, I, I, I, Kathy Acker”: <www.ica.art/exhibitions/i-i-i-i-i-i-i-kathy-acker> [accessed 31 July, 2019].

4. Kathy Acker GET RID OF MEANING, 5 Nov-2 Dec 2018, Badischer Kunstverein, <www.badischer-kunstverein.de/index.php?Direction=Programm&list=Vorschau&Detail=724> [accessed 31 July 2019].

in poems a meaning is expected. All the same, a writer needs raw material with which to start one's work, like a painter, a sculptor, or a musician. / This question of language as raw material is not a futile one, since it may help to clarify how in history and in politics the handling of language is different."¹ And Acker writes next to it, "The raw is also meaning." In *Portraits*, we see an early version of manipulating the raw into something that is always political. [CF]

[15] pillows and sheets This dreamlike scene where the narrator protects herself from gunshots with bedding, stopping the bullets, recurs in 1973 *Stripper Disintegration*: [Melvin] pulls out a gun I shield myself with a mattress the bullet doesn't hit me (cf. *infra*, p. 326). We could recognize in those images a deep, child-like, fantasy of the bed as protection and refuge, neutralizing (apparently at least, as we can see in the passage) inimical forces: hide in a room/ draw mattresses over head here is safe².

1. Monique Wittig, "The Trojan Horse," *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.

2. *Journal Black Cats* Black Jewels, summer 1972, cf. *infra*, p. 208.

Portraits and Visions

kathy acker

(ca. summer 1971; pub. 2/1973)

her world is formed by friendship not by love she keeps in touch with herself by drawing in 1970 male-females a boot on one foot partly open a three-inch heeled sandal on her other foot triangular pieces of cloth velvets diamonds cover a knee showing her thigh flowing hats cover her face let the straggly hair appear long fingers bony hands they are skinny and tall their navels showing the rags part around half-erect cocks with jewels or ribbons hung around them in 1971 she draws females and serious comics copped from some old Baron a woman partly evil and very innocent beautiful leaping towards a moon hidden angel a curtain frame of curling and rising cocks a curtain frame on which two women lie one supine and one sitting her hand lifted above her face and her face partly hidden she tries to keep herself alive and touch and conscious she avoids situations in which she could be dependent as when Lenny loves her she wants to be taken care of and loved and rejects that in her she is very nervous trying to keep herself together and conscious she now talks slowly enough to be understood but does not describe her feelings as often or as clearly as she thinks she is doing she is very shy about feeling not female and wanting to feel not female and condemns lesbianism or the asexuality some of us need to espouse yet she likes gay men and does not like to be thought by men sexually she feels she is strong and will survive Mary has a picture of a woman a more beautiful and evil self-portrait around the head of thin black lines a black heart a gold line around the neck to the right of the face a thin red line maybe near her mouth

9

I was in a house outside was a street and the beginning of a huge highway very hilly on which cars swooped up and down I went into the street either walked or was somehow in a car turned around in the middle of the highway I was walking up the street and saw a very sedate woman I knew in fake black leather shorts and halter leaping on the street I thought she must be a prostitute I was back in the house now a camp or a meeting-place it might have been a girls' dormitory before there was a war and we were the defensive only it was our turn to attack I had been buying birthday presents out on the street a record on sale and some kind of clothing I was at the final meeting or the beginning of the attack there were three other men we were gathered around a sort of fireplace in which there were pounds of hash and opium which we had to smoke I kept smoking gobbling eating I was stoned all the people were around us watching us the men went away with small weapons to the other side I decided I didn't want to a man or a woman had told me my nipple had ten pores which ran all through my breasts I had been making love with a man a woman lay down partly to my left side and partly on top of me she started kissing my breast and then started doing something else I was about to come

13 (Second for Lynn)

an angel flies through our minds and through our senses she touches us touching her huge wings fold around us peacock feathers ostrich and owl raven black like the night outside this

window endless hair of hemp and thick silk scarves the hidden
nipples of the breasts woven peyote beads and strings of light
light over the curve of her shoulder a muscle extends from the
edge of her left breast to her navel hair falling around our hands
and eyes the senses hidden she has her own smells cat smells and
unearthly air smells and sun hair from beneath our glands our
own smells we never each her cock moves behind us and within
us, and her stronger more hidden sex the holier sex we move up
through her arms through her sexes her eyes and mouth through
her thick black lips blue lips darker than the night the heaven she
knows darkness of its symbol dark caves and earth and curving
doors dark waves with no distinction between the sea and the air
the darkness of the glands arms crossed the shaved female head.

The text reproduced here was published in *Manroot*, #8, February 1973, "Womanhood", editors: Paul Mariah and Richard Tagett, South San Francisco (California), p. 102-103.

They are likely part of a longer series.

The original typescript may be the one archived and bound along with *The Destruction of the US: The Burning Bombing of America* under the title *Portraits: Visions* at the New York University's Fales Library & Special Collections – Box 5 – Folder 1, which we can see listed in the inventory of Kathy Acker's Notebooks.¹

These shorts prose texts would have been written during the summer of 1971, based on their formal aspects and themes. In the same inventory in the Fales Collection, we can see that a text entitled "2nd for Lynn Lonidier" is featured in a holograph manuscript from July 1971 (box 3, folder 4).

Notes:

128 taken care of and loved Very similar passage in the *Section from DIARY* (1971): I ask him to love me meaning I want him to take care of me I don't know what that statement ~~means~~ more feeling means [...] every time he tries to help me do something even take over my decisions I am completely pissed (cf. *supra*, p. 41). This passage, and the one about "feeling not female" immediately after, remind us of similar text segments in Acker's contemporary 1st person narratives, such as *Section from DIARY*. Once acknowledged such similarities with 1st person narrative, the title "Portraits", and the apparent poetic depiction of third person characters that follow, shouldn't be too quickly characterized as tentatives to sculpt a radical alterity in words or create a realist illusion of immediacy with the "external" world. The second part of the title – "and Visions" – should be taken into consideration for these pieces as well as those featured in *July Portraits*. The term "vision" gained an important meaning in Acker's practice, as she used it later – instead of "expression" which is determined by knowledge – to characterize what is for her "communication".² Perhaps we should understand the title as referring to two different approaches, "portraits": more receptive towards things, towards people as objects, and careful to translate their appearance; and "visions" more actively into exploration, and self-stimulated. But in spite of the scopic meaning implied in terms like "portrait" and "vision," Acker's small prose works play much more with temporal intensity than with depiction of images. Which means, as her writing grows more distant from representation, and in so doing brings forward language, she starts creating non-referential forms indistinguishable from their meaning. They are verbal rather than nominative, multiplying actions, feelings, movements. The effect is like that present in dreams where the eye is propelled in medias res into situations. These verbal forms

1. "Guide to the Kathy Acker notebook", Fales Library, <www.dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/fales/acker/dsc.html> [accessed: June 1, 2019]

2. Kathy Acker, "Preface", in *Bodies of Work: Essays*, Serpent's Tail (London), 1997, p. viii.

are accumulative rather than articulate, superposing words into the fading layers of an impression, instead of unfolding words into a mimetic syntax.

129 Lynn Very likely writer Lynn Lonidier who published her long poetry piece *Lesbian Estate* in the same issue of *Manroot*. She is mentioned in a dream narrative, in *Stripper Disintegration* (cf. infra, p. 298).

129 Lynn Let's look closer at Lynn – Lynn Lonidier – and her piece, “A Lesbian Estate,” published along with these Acker “Portraits” in *Manroot*. The first poem in “A Lesbian Estate” is “I LIVES IN'A GARBJJ CAN,” starts with a list of famous Beat poets and imagines them kneeling in a fantasy school photo together, the Class of Great Poets!, then spins off into further parody, miming Beat language while criticizing the exclusive masculinity that undergirds the Beat image. I love how this poem makes the “men’s school” of poetry a literal place, and tries to imagine what a female counterpart could look like. Lonidier writes:

Aunty Burroughs’ Blueblood Finishing School of limping Voices
Growing Vaulted over backrow of mirrored boys immune to girls
segregated from lockerroom stances of saints’ blowjobs on Clark-Gable-
Beautiful with-an-earthquake-going-on workout¹

She lands on the “finishing school,” as the repressive institution that tends to vacuum up young female-assigned people, while the male ones get to go out On The Road. The girl’s school is a big Acker motif, from the sampling of Violette Leduc’s lesbian sex literary masterpiece *Thérèse and Isabelle* in *The Childlike Life...* to the creepy hallways and bloody labyrinthine chambers in *My Mother: Demonology*, which are a warped version of Dario Argento’s film *Suspiria*.² With Lonidier we can think about the finishing school as a place full of feral girls ready to break out, the mirror image of the “boy’s club”:

Work-It-On-Out Coruac Casslure Orlovbergough You never let
me be in the school picture Ferlintov you never put my poetry in
yourYearlyYearbooks You sent my poems home with coffee blood ass
stains on them I’ll have my turn at the top o’ 1970 I’ll be QUEEN O’
THE CLASS IyamIyamIyam While youse dead or turned into old men
peeing in your cinched-up rantpants Sheiks in your pockets holes in your
Trojans So ancient you’ll turn into OliveOil Crones I’ll be yr wufst w’mun
English teacher’s favorite pet in an EXclusive ALL GIRLS’ School for
Writers IcanIcanIcan³ [CF]

1. Lynn Lonidier, “A Lesbian Estate,” *Manroot*, 8, 1973, p. 63.

2. The artist Anja Casser did a killer reading of *My Mother Demonology* at the Kathy Acker GET RID OF MEANING symposium in Karlsruhe, Germinay, in November of 2018. In her talk Casser weaves together witchy phenomenology, blood, cuts, moms, post-WWII traces of trauma in architecture, and of course girls and maggots. The piece is forthcoming, in a book that assembles the proceedings of the symposium.

3. Lynn Lonidier, “A Lesbian Estate,” *Manroot*, 8, 1973, p. 63.

129 #13 (Second for Lynn) *It doesn't seem like a coincidence that the portrait dedicated to her very out lesbian friend Lynn Lonidier ends with the shaved female head: the importance of hair in queer aesthetics is not to be underestimated! Her hair takes on immense representational power as it stands in for what seems incredible about Acker's public image: of a queer, butch, afab person in the middle of all these culture icons. D Mortimer writes, "I'm not an Acker worshiper... but her public image has always been important to me as a trans masc person. Her sore thumb blonde crew cut, her arms and her tattoos – all that leather! She was like a great muse come to life—except butch and AFAB!"¹ But the hair, like the cats, also becomes one of the general technologies of Acker's entire environment-protocol: spending time cutting or dying your own hair is also spending time inside with product on your head so you can't leave, surrounded by books and writing. In a 1995 Acker email to McKenzie Wark:*

(My bleach is dripping down my fax. I'll have to get off. Shit. This isn't a very academic email. It'll be more interesting next time. I need new books to read. Oh shit, it's getting in my eyes. Why am I so set on having white hair? Oh, I was trying to read *__The Work Of Fire__* (Blanchot). But it got boring. And Robbe-Grillet started to amuse. (Going back to my childhood there. Pure obsession. Maybe I'll read Duras again—the ultimate candy)...²

Bleach, letters, philosophy, fiction and gossip all metabolized together, sinking into the skin. [CF]

1. Anna Cafolla, "The radical, seducing influence of Kathy Acker," *DAZED*, 9 May 2019, <www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/44381/1/the-radical-seducing-influence-of-kathy-acker> [accessed 31 July 2019].

2. Kathy Acker and McKenzie Wark, *I'm Very Into You: Correspondence 1995-1996*, South Pasadena CA: Semiotext(e), 2015.



Black and white photograph. From left to right: Leonard Neufeld, Jerome Rothenberg and Kathy Acker. It is featured in Rothenberg's poetry book, *Esther K. Comes to America* (1931), third installment of "an ongoing series of ancestral poems" called *Poland / 1931*; pub. by Unicorn Press, 1974. The book is presented as the program of a show, several pictures thus illustrate it. The cover montage was created by Eleanor Antin, the "cast" for the pictures was: Kathy Acker, Cyrelle Foreman, Leonard Neufeld and Jerome Rothenberg. According to Neufeld, the photographs were likely taken in late 1973, or even in 1972 (near the spring maybe). Photograph: © Laurence (Larry) Fink.



Diary Warmcatfur

kathy acker

(1/1972)

D I A R Y

W A R M C A T F U R

1 / 7 2

K A T H Y A C K E R

D I A R Y W A R M C A T F U R

KEY WORD LESBIAN

registered at N. Y. U. classics again though I can't get a loan or tuition paid until next year can't afford full tuition now: feel this is right I'm interested in things again and I'm working hard in many ways when I met some of the professors felt the same depression I felt at UCSD dead men I don't want to be dead that way write a thesis on the Aristotelian 'e' flattery and pretending I'm whoever whoever Prof. Garble/o wants me to be I need money put on red thick tights jeans boots a 30's blue-flowered shirt pirate blue jean jacket black wool cap went to see J. hear Ed read see new people Ed's reading was terrific afterwards a glass of Chivas Regal with J. Ed B. who I've wanted to meet and whom I admire greatly I gave her a copy of Christmas almost-impressionistic diary she probably won't like it and I was wrong to do that I didn't know how else to get to her and she's a stand-offish person long ride home while J. dropped everyone off past floating lights empty dead buildings flying cars people changed into ghosts at the end of which a guy for fifteen minutes backing into moving out of backing into moving out of a narrow parking space tension with L: he has a great desire to constantly touch my body when he's around me he wants me to want him I don't spend much time with him I have work to do even when he's home I feel uneasy when I'm around him I have to do something I don't want to or can't do something I want to do I have no idea how and if we're going to be easy with each other haven't done anything about self-lesbian-fantasies desires taken it out on L. who I make troubled enough and who I confuse I was going to go to a dance and see how I react I've copped out of so many of my plans already have to do Greek so I can at least slowly read Sophokles work 3 hours a day

why write a diary rather than a writing that's more accessible to other people not just writing for myself could keep writing that Roman diary which is very beautiful and accessible this is where my greatest warmth is and different textures also can deal with the lesbian thing (when I'm

admitting I'm bisexual-lesbian I feel warm to L. & love him otherwise
uptight when he admits it about me: the same exceptional trouble
arguments hatred)

[2]

still nervous excited from last night went to D.O.B. dance after a year
and a half of thinking about it and wondering about myself sexually with
minimum evidence to go on for the last two months fantasizing a woman
not a man was fucking me and being cold to L. because I was unable to
do anything about my lesbianism (not his fault). fucked-up friendships
with H., M. due to my own repression incredible fears that I still must
have. got to dance around 9:30 empty room in church dark stained
glass green walls 5 girls sitting on chairs 6 or 8 other women standing
in groups talking I get a cruddy Piels beer dish-water slop even more
tense throughout most of the night members of D.O.B. stick together talk
mostly together stray women not so attractive talk in twos or threes now
and then dance. talk to one charming couple mainly to the more manly (?)
woman about being gay about gay women in general they're nice but not
terribly interesting to me. feel strange don't know the customs if any afraid
I'll insult without wanting to nervous aware my nervousness shows. "this
is your first time here" take for granted I'm gay. categories are alien and
probably hurt more than they give confidence: there's the cliques of gay
women but there are many women in between too scared to talk to other
women sexually not wanting or yet having enough reason to live only
among women. danced with one woman N.ancy last time I danced with
her could relax delighted wanted to spend time with her she was running
around alot with other women scared of imposing myself. walked with
her to the subway somewhat talking I wasn't relaxed enough to talk. other
interesting women (from sight didn't really talk to anyone else). great deal
of flack. talked to L. Later he wanted to know emotional details too private
didn't want to contribute that way to his excitement. he's being very kind
uneasy? too excited to go get to sleep. being here is being someone else
than with women in D.O.B. I'm not used to the non-repressive situation
new and the same

[3] walked over to C. P. hospital to see if I could find Nancy she's actually shy maybe moreso than I am she was in a psychopathology class a woman she kept arguing with at the end of the term became her lover after they split she tried going to gay bars uncomfortable first time she went to D.O.B. she might not have yet slept with a woman wore high sharp heels long fingernails a dress to show she was really a woman in second or third year of college left there her parent's house where she had been living she couldn't accept her lesbianism unlike me she found it first easier to act politically only ~~from~~ recently she's ~~found it possible~~ stopped going from meeting to meeting and thought more about her desires I like her for being political and being with a lot of people. as we talk we sometimes touch or hold hands but not in the way I do when I'm about to sleep with someone: her touch makes me feel good. she's been involved with Linda for a while now she went down with Linda and her parents' to Florida though don't live together yet even though they're going together. Nancy's more unsure of herself than I thought she was she has a feeling who/what she can handle when she needs help she's very gentle retiring firm when I kissed her goodbye she smelled strange the other contacts for me unstrange later called Margie if she wanted to have dinner with me Thursday go to D. O. B. meeting a show on T. V. about girls' prison matron is getting one inmate to kill off certain other inmates a parole officer becomes an inmate to find out what is happening matron and parole officer have a knife fight to me LESBIAN is a woman who sleeps with another woman, to Margie a woman who hates/dislikes men also: everyone she meets immediately tries to make her if she went to a woman's dance she could just dance call from Reggie: arrange to with him to GAA dance one Saturday still all problems with L. about sex my lack of sexual passionate feeling for him

do I love N? watching her cry in the car unable to meet her said to Linda will you stay with N? it makes me feel good to see her talk with her even when she attacks me for 'relating' to a guy. we're very different she doesn't let herself have individual freakish opinions her main argument against me if I didn't accept society's labels I didn't exist I see freakiness everywhere she sees repression talks to the people she works with who she can't allow to find out she's gay as if they she are stupid females. I love to watch her the way the lids come over her eyes the knotty red cut of her skin smell her hair. like embracing Margie goodbye last night. I certainly

don't want to live with Nancy get involved with her; she's too much into organizations doesn't have much tolerance for people who act differently than she does. she doesn't relate to males to males at all (I don't care). at the D.O.B. meeting introduced her to M. M. said she she thought Nancy disliked her she tried to ignore Margie I was sure N. didn't want to speak to me after Wednesday because I'm bisexual Margie and I rode up with Nancy and Linda to the rally they were quarreling the whole time we got out of the car Nancy crying I felt helpless Linda said she was going to stay with Nancy. 15 minutes later saw them spoke to Linda Nancy turning away hiding in Linda's arm Margie: they were very cold to us maybe they thought I was an outsider hurting/ wanting to hurt them. because I'm bisexual. 9:30 call Nancy she's crying she was breaking up with Linda hang up phone. can't do anything. she's now thinking only of Linda being miserable maybe she'll pick up someone this weekend be a bit happier. I'm overexcited part of reason for overreaction to Nancy.

[4]

called up Nancy to say hello see if she's O.K. say hello she doesn't answer for awhile ask is she's O.K. yes no she doesn't know I started being defensive and I'm even worse she doesn't want to talk to me I'm very agitated pet cats look out window I should go to see the women's art show don't want to because Margie's coming over tonight all nights full. 3 days until Greek class I'm only on Chapter 10 can I read Sophokles? don't know any of the texts for either class. go over in my mind work hard my work: the center of my life don't need someone to rest on keep going on myself. bought four red snapper filets 12 clams for Margie and me four bottles of Guinness Stout. 2 hours on Unemployment lines first on EB the wrong line half hour on information line to get slip of paper to take to BX line three jammed BX lines people crushed lady asks if I've been looking for a job heard over the radio Marty the former sex boss busted so I might not be able to get more unemployment I don't give a damn so much crud to get more money 3 million people on heroine. I should go out do something. call Ed to get back the diary I gave Bernadette my only copy so I was an idiot to give it to her I badly wanted her to read it. upset about Nancy not answering me. want to call Nancy decide: don't. plan in my head go to GAA dance Friday can I do it no lesbian women ~~wi~~ will talk to me since I live with a guy despite L's and my complete freedom I'll never have anyone to love I shouldn't give a damn go dance with Margie/ other people enjoy myself dancing. like the Castenedo book: making a decision with the heart after decision made there's no continuous mind-mulling. Jerry last night that after I left Sandy crazy how he knifed a cowboy through the bottom of the neck wanted to wanted to kill.

The text reproduced here is a 5-page typescript, archived at the New York University Fales Library & Special Collections, Kathy Acker Notebooks, Mss 434 – Box 1 – Folder 9. The pages are numbered from 2 to 4.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to the text's original pagination.

Diary Warmcatfur was composed in New York, between December 1971 and January 1972.

Notes:

139 N. Y. U. This return to college to study classics isn't noted by Kraus in her biography. Acker mentions it in a 1988 conversation: did a year in the joint course in Classics and Philosophy at CCNY and NYU¹. Her study of Greek during this period (she had also studied it at UCSD, from 1967 to 1970) will eventually give her the tools she needs for her project of rewriting The Thesmophoriazousae in the second half of 1973.

139 with J. Ed B. Probably Jerome Rothenberg, either Ed Bowes or Ed Friedman and Bernadette Mayer, to whom she would have offered a copy of "Christmas almost-impressionistic diary" — is it Section from DIARY? a first version of Politics? or another unknown text? Ed Friedman, along with Rébecca Brown, Herbert Krohn, and Joseph White gave a reading at St. Mark's Poetry Project on January 19, 1972.²

139 admire greatly Bernadette Mayer by January 1972 had already written several books even though few were published: Ceremony Latin (1964; pub. 1975), Red Book In Three Parts (1965-66; pub. 2002), Story (1968, pub. as a special issue of o TO 9), The Old Style Is Finding Out Something About A Whole New Set of Possibilities (1968; pub. 1976 and 2015), Moving (1971, pub. by Angel Hair Books), Memory (1971; pub. 1975).³ So, by this date, in addition to what had been published in magazines, Acker could have read Story and Moving. It is probable she attended Mayer's exhibition Memory, installed at Holly Solomon's 98 Greene Street space in February 1972: the installation was composed of 1100 photographs (Mayer shot a 35mm roll every day of July 1971) and nearly 7 hours of recorded poetry. Acker corresponded with Mayer from 1972 until 1975, according to our reading of the letters that still exist (cf. infra). After that, Acker may have taken her distance from the St. Mark's community into which she had never felt completely accepted or similar.

139 self-lesbian-fantasies desires It seems Kathy Acker, between 1970 and 1972, made constant efforts to accept and explore her lesbian fantasies as well as

1. Conversation between Acker and Dean Kuipers, at Gramercy Park Hotel Bar (NYC), July 2, 1988; pub. in Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Melville House, 2018, p. 65.

2. Cf. *The Readings List – Readings & Events at the St. Mark's Poetry Project, 1966-1980*, document available on the Poetry Project website.

3. Cf. *Eating the Colors of a Lineup of Words*, *The early books of Bernadette Mayer*, Bernadette Mayer, "Editor's note", Sation Hill of Barrytown, 2015.

to get closer to women. Sex work brought her into regular contact with women's bodies, have (simulated?) sex with some,¹ and created a context in which she often felt more connected to her female co-workers. Her texts written from the sex work material seem to point to a pleasure in communicating between female workers and far from any masculine presence (the conversations with her fellow sex workers in dressing-rooms fed many of her later texts). In the *Section from DIARY* she evokes her strong desire to be in love with a girl meanwhile she keeps edging away from any situation that has the remotest possibility even fantasy of becoming strong². She expresses frustration at being stuck in the role play she categorizes as heterosexual, and her inability to adapt to a non-repressive situation³ as she calls it. For her, having queer sex represented going past "top-bottom" sex, thus finding a radically different way to articulate desire, bodies, and power. This longing for freedom, and her frustration for not succeeding easily, stimulated her animosity for her masculine partner who came to incarnate (based on our reading of the present text) the patriarchal domination she felt intensely conditioned by. The way she felt that she repressed herself in women's company, her description of the way Leonard felt free to touch her, the need to be recognized as lesbian by him and others, all combined into a generalized frustration, and a total lack of desire for heteronormative sexual relations. Normative sex seemed impossible, given the situation of oppression. But as she writes in *Diary Warmcatfur*, being with women involved a deep deconstruction of her way to talk and think (getting rid of categories) as well as the adoption of a new semiotics of sexualized communication. This new semiotics, modeled in the style of *Diary Warmcatfur*, attempts to intervene on the scopic narrow perspective of language organized around the phallus. In this other semiotics, tactile and olfactory sensations are suddenly spread, intensified and multiplied (a good example of this is the first page of *Politics* which opens with a queer sex scene between the narrator and another woman).⁴ LESBIANS prefer the convoluting halls of sensuality to direct goal-pursuing mores.⁵ The appearances of the word "cat" throughout Acker's early works, as a reference to the animal as well as a poetic tool, could be deeply linked to this alternative semiotics of desire: caress of the fur, licking oneself and others, licking sweat and armpits, rubbing oneself, smelling.

139 self-lesbian-fantasies desires What might this "alternative semiotics of desire" look like? What practically makes *Diary Warmcatfur* a text that is formative in Acker's attempts to merge her material writing experiments with her sense of how (uncritical, normative, non-parodied) "top-bottom" sexual dynamics are transferred – or

1. "I was hung up on the idea of sleeping with a girl outside of business" (*Section of DIARY*, cf. *supra*, p. 56).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 56-57.

3. *Diary Warmcatfur*, p. 140.

4. Cf. also *Rip-Off Red*, *Girl Detective* (April-June 1973), where right after an heterosexual fantasy Acker describes a lesbian sex scene in a plane and compares one to the other: "Now desire doesn't center in my clit but turns around my body, my nerves swirl until my whole body shivers and trembles to touch this stranger in every way and everywhere." (Grove Press, 2002, p. 15).

5. Kathy Acker, *New York City in 1979* (1981), Penguin Books, 2018, p. 4.

transformed – via language? In one of their older essays the poet Eileen Myles tackles their version of lesbian poetics. It's useful to us here because the essay gives us a way to think about the creative gesture of writing, and how that gesture might change depending on the poet's identity. Does the poet have something to prove and to whom? Where does the poet see themselves reflected in the existing archive of what poets have done and can do? Myles:

I have to say I began to perceive a male shape, a conversation with God the Father. A conversation man to man, because of course I am not alone in my mortality, men are also making marks. And showing their marks like a man. Masturbating, having sex with God. It strikes me that the act of creativity, male creativity is a conversation with a masculine God, a self-fulfilling act of male conception, something roomy. I know that I can't see like a man, fuck like a man, not exactly. His literature doesn't fit me. Nor should it. He makes art for different reasons from me. To perpetuate himself. To rewrite woman.¹

Take that line: "He makes art for different reasons from me." And, as Myles tells us, these reasons influence the way that you write, especially the rhythm of it, and the spread of it. This passage relates really well to the Acker work we've been seeing, because it links masturbation to rhythm and an embodied motivation (which becomes political action) and we've already been discussing how Acker's masturbation work both fits into but critically masticates what Myles names "male creativity." In Acker, the creative language that she's reaching toward seems to be centered on texture **this is where my greatest warmth is and different textures** (cf. *supra*, p. 139). She develops this texture, practically, by producing strings of sentence parts that accumulate, residue of desire and confusion building to texture: called up Nancy to say hello see if she's O.K. say hello she doesn't answer for awhile ask is she's O.K. yes no she doesn't know I started being defensive and I'm even worse she doesn't want to talk to me I'm very agitated pet cats look out window I should go see the women's art show don't want because Margie's coming over tonight all nights full. Following Myles, this kind of sentence is a way of perpetuating, of claiming space, but it doesn't spurt so much a spread, more of an ooze than an ejaculation. And any body can ooze, even if historically porousness tends to be associated with female-identified bodies (with all their penetrability / stabilized against a mythic male impenetrability). In this text the oozing format accompanies the non-repressive situation that the narrator is interested in in this text. We'll see this shift slightly when she gets to *Politics*: here she will try on a language that oozes less from the vantage point of one narrator. That, instead, takes multiple points of view, expressed in more precisely bounded sentences, and throws them all into the cesspool of her(our) contemporary experience. In *Politics*, the ooze isn't just inside of us: it's everywhere, each "I" pulled into a collectivity defined by a shared system of language, sex, and power. [CF]

140 DOB The Daughters of Bilitis, lesbian civil and political rights organization. Their New York's chapter in 1972 was at 141 Prince Street, one block outside

1. Eileen Myles, "The Lesbian Poet," from *School of Fish*, 1997.

Greenwich Village; it was a “4,000 square foot loft which included a partitioned-off office and library, kitchen, and a slow dance room to accommodate the organization’s monthly socials.”¹

141 This passage is so perfect to send to your queer friends if you want to talk about Acker and NYC’s historic lesbian social scene. What hasn’t changed: that nervous excitement when you go to the queer bar for the first time. The city gets suffused with your excitement, with possibility. Like this way that Lisa Robertson describes French author Violette Leduc’s writing (the same author who wrote *Thérèse and Isabelle*, pirated by Acker in *The Childlike Life...*): “Here the city is an organism with fur. It radiates from the skin of women on a terrace. It’s not different from their bodies, it’s between them. It’s desire’s figured surface. What the body feels, the city will express.”² [CF]

142 **Marty** Martin J. Hodas, Acker’s former employer at the Fun City live sex show.

142 **unemployment** Acker received unemployment for more or less a year after being fired from Fun City.³

142 **Ed to get** This time, undoubtedly Ed Bowes, filmmaker and Bernadette Mayer’s companion.

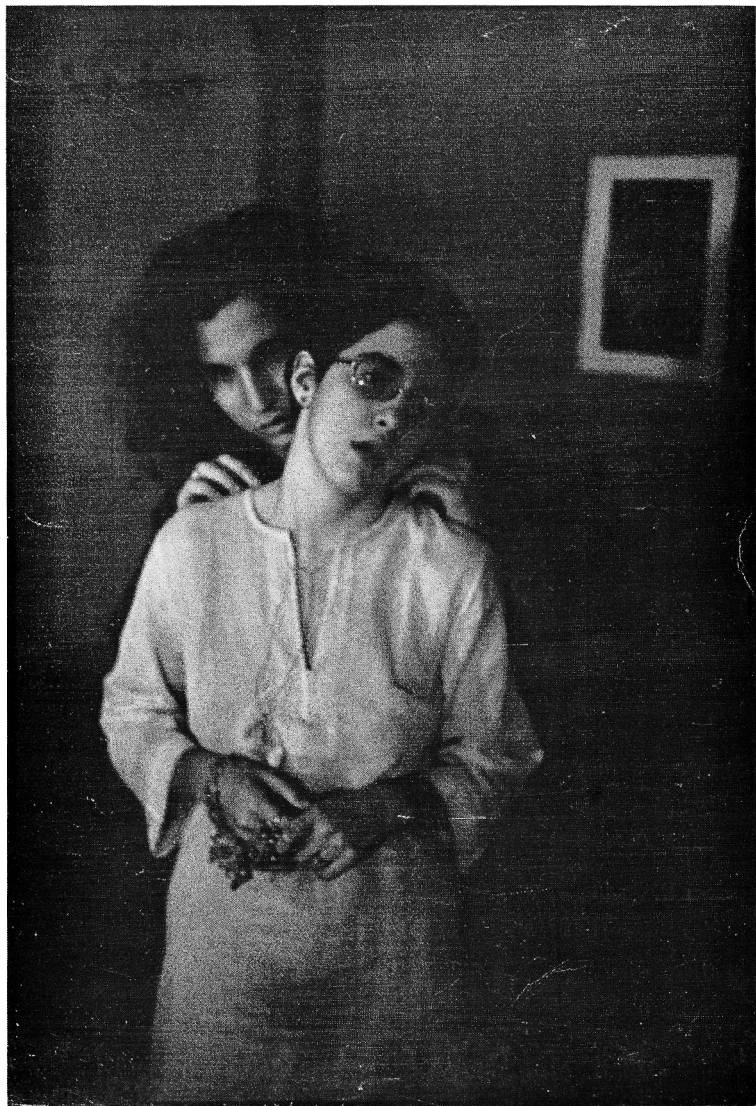
142 **GAA** The Gay Activists Alliance.

1. *Researching Greenwich History*, <www.greenwichvillagehistory.wordpress.com/tag/daughters-of-bilitis/> [accessed on June 8, 2019].

2. Lisa Robertson, “notes on Violette Leduc’s *La Batarde*”, in *REVOLUTION: An Annotated Reader*, Paris: Paraguay Press, 2015.

3. Cf. Acker’s interview with Barry Alpert, at Mitali Restaurant (NYC), for *Only Paper Today*, March 30, 1976; pub. in Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Melville House, 2018, p. 21.

THEORY



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leonard neufeld

Leonard Neufeld and Kathy Acker on the cover of Theory, by Leonard Neufeld, poetry book produced and distributed by the author, March 1972; staple binding, print of 100 signed by Neufeld. Black and white photograph: © Laurence (Larry) Fink.

Politics

kathy acker

(pub. 5/1972)

POLITICS

by

Kathy Acker

published by

Papyrus Press

May 1972

I'm lying in bed with her I touch the visible scalp in the center of her forehead then I run my hands slowly down her long and messy locks we meet kissing for a long time feeling the texture of mouths then of the skin and the position of our bones the inset of the eyes and the thinness of the ears the tenseness and warmth within our bones especially within the small of the back forces us to our and each other's sex: breasts and hair and smell for a very long time we arouse each other always with a minimum of caress warm heavy breasts salty bitterness of the hair under our arms that cats adore to lick we have our arms around each other's shoulders our bodies barely touch we look at each other her long brown hair very white skin she has a thin mouth that opens wide when she smiles brown eyes I like mine my hair is almost gone my face looks long like a child's we move closer together I can feel that she wants to come I move slowly down the bed pressing my tongue and fingers against each part of her body tasting and smelling her finally lick and suck her clit and the skin around her clit so that she comes we are still I feel my body is almost rigid the muscles around my cunt are strained and tensed she holds me kisses my forehead she gets up from the bed to fuck me I lay on my back watching the ceiling I'm waiting for her I look up at her face I touch her falling breasts and nipples with my hand as I feel her fucking me and open my legs wider I come a few times I yell and kiss her ears and the skin of her face.

she tried her best to kill me and to make me into nothing she promised gifts or rewards and then forgot her promises her actions depended on her moods and not on anything I did and her moods changed rapidly child friend enemy authoritarian ghost she was happiest being treated as a child and being waited on she wanted to have money or power which she didn't have she tried to not give me toys clothes later to stop me from doing what I wanted to do and to make me die I thought that she didn't like me because of certain ways I was acting or because of what I thought but she disliked me for deeper and more irrational reasons she hated me when I was alone she hated me when I had boyfriends she hated my schooling she hated me when I got married separated she had hated me probably as soon as I was born but hadn't had the guts to get rid of me or give me away.

he photographs her sitting alone in a café or a restaurant behind a large bottle of champagne there is a distant look in her eyes as if there was a mystery besides the loneliness and tenseness against the loneliness she looks strong the thin pointed bones in her face the white skin and half-open lips her hair is tightly pulled back from her face and hidden so that she would look like a man if her face didn't have a delicate contour she wears a suit dark jacket tie white shirt she is alone she is not wearing any makeup her eyes are large and dark they are closed doors into her desire to be sure of herself and to have a lover her knees are crossed beneath the table two cigarettes have been smoked.

I come into the room or I'm in the room we're talking to each other as we talk on the phone without strain our bodies on top of the coral and red cover. I feel relaxed as I put my head on her shoulder talk to her we lightly touch or we look at each other's eyes green eyes strange thin lips I feel desire I've wanted to sleep with her for 6 years to kiss suck at her breasts innumerable times I've seen her strange body I want her to tell me that she also feels strongly about me and wants me. I want to tell her this I want to go over to her house and stay with her tonight I want to be next to her incredible warmth white thick skin. as long as she doesn't deny me what now is possible between us I can stay happy and want to see her when she denies me teases me by taking off her clothes kissing and biting someone else I feel blocked helpless I'm no longer able to deal with anyone. I take days deciding if I should ask why she's hurting me and if she's scared of or dislikes me when I ask bluntly she's gentle to me I know we're friends I don't care if I'm alone or going to be with other people for days.

I tell him my desire everyone has deserted me he touches me his fingers come up to the sides of my eyes slide down the skin I am in control and I am not going to be rejected actual flesh actual warmth the thighs so thin I can see the bones under his flesh moving like rapists behind the long livingroom curtain I can no longer feel physical sensations I smell his skin in the hollows between his head and shoulder the strange blond hairs this is the only relief I know the only time I relax unless I'm completely alone an empty house in the woods -- a dream. I can talk freely tell what I think and want the contact of extremely white junk flesh a body as big as mine and as complicated in need and desire to be left alone two arms go around my arms and chest the weight at the upper edge of my legs makes my thighs lift up my muscles tense relax forming a cup starting at my cunt beginning at the throb of my clit which needs to be touched by his flesh I go slowly each rhythm aware of the other rhythm of endless needs later for the sake of pleasing him and feeling good I reach down and put his cock in my mouth. using tongue and as much as possible without vomiting the throat at the same time explore where I can go mentally through the water slide up to him kiss him and earning to be held

a black angel comes down and runs her huge feathers down my head and around my back her wings are the hairs around the cock her yes flip out she senses with her mouth pressing into mine I talk to her in low tones like a pregnant cat my belly full of fluid and guts and brains she blesses me and unfolds herself a deck of sacred cards an old Japanese fan in which a man consigns his paramour to a hospital surrounded by thin black frames and long feathers she takes my legs in her hand runs her fingers up and down the skin repeating old words she breathes thick perfumes and cat fur promising to stay to insert her tongue between the nail and the skin to let me kiss her breast and sleep lost between her legs to let me finally lose consciousness become a nonentity a new entity a huge roaming animal descending from the hills only in the depth of the night.

the filthy bedcover on stage I'm allergic to this way of life mine? the last time I got on stage for the first ten minutes I felt I wasn't me I was going through mechanical personality changes and actions I got scared I might flip in front of the sex-crazy lunatics finally got into the Santa Claus routine I was a little girl all excited because Santa Claus was going to bring me Christmas presents I couldn't go to sleep I was waiting and waiting and then and then you know what happened doctor Santa Claus came right into my room I'm taking my clothes my shoes off rubbing my breasts Lenny dreamt last night about fucking Cyrelle she was lecturing him on how to fuck a woman he told her that he didn't need the lecture she thought he was wrong he was sucking an older woman's cunt it was also a cock without changing from a cunt this is a romantic section a very romantic life ha ha I was writing in the projection room the shifts said they'd clean and wax the floor it's still piss black can't see no roaches no more it's hotter than usual the projectionist was constantly bugging me some guy they say drunk hit Josie on her ass during her show yesterday his hat the cashier says he came up told him you're not allowed to bring liquor up here then the cashier an Indian guy turns to Washington an old black janitor tells him that he's not to come again on the weekends he has no mind he can't remember anything he's not to ask to get paid again he gets \$1.00 he's too old he won't be able to work much longer he's sick he's senile he's looking at me red blaring eyes we're at the Embers cruddy food at least no one's taking off his clothes they all want to SCREW this week (we find in the projection room) is about orgies mentions every place but ours only the fuzz know about 113 swingers SCREW says are very jealous about their mates? you can't get involved with a girl you fuck at an orgy unless you've

got her guy's O.K. which isn't they say likely I don't know about vice-versa at an orgy everyone wants to have everyone else only once no two guys together the males want to watch the females screw so that occurs it turns them on the best orgy I ever went to a cunt's writing started with two girls making it on the livingroom floor Lenny tells me Lawrence is a romantic Kangaroo red and black striped overalls no hair I don't know what the fuck to do with it I'm getting to look so ugly it won't do anything like stand straight out fuzz into balls two more shows and everything's over I felt dead writing before I could be dead now waking up I got a sacred Mexican ring yesterday to do just that remember every single dream for the next two weeks as soon as I wake up not getting so pissed off all the time completely hostile I'd like jewels this life's not romantic enough too hidden yet to be found in the fucking brain and mind I have to get back to the show Lenny's putting on his coat son of a bitch

after we had dinner at this god awful chinese restaurant fake chinese gardens the waiter shit wouldn't give another bowl to us for the winter melon soup for two on the menu Mickey was barely able to kiss Mark goodbye we went to Mark's house 13th and A stories about how if you venture out there after dark one block or more you automatically get raped mugged castrated we smoked went into the bedroom to see the new waterbed it was gorgeous like being in the ocean the waves lapping back and forth it was the only thing in the room except for a tape deck white walls no curtains Mark said he was going to paint the walls different shades of blue stripped in a funnel the rug would be dyed to

match the ceiling the floor would be an actual funnel you'd go right through I was completely smashed Mark was hot for Lenny spent an hour? two hours? making these absurd hints he only wanted to sleep with Ellen the new dancer Lenny was playing dumb too smashed or not digging he finally said do you want to sleep with me Lenny didn't want me to leave the room I didn't want to leave the waterbed under any circumstances my dress kept getting undone earlier in the evening Mark had been kissing me he gave a speech about male male fucking god knows why he ever wants a female I said I the fucking cats didn't want to sleep with Mark Mark said he'd prefer Lenny between the two of us he'd take us both he didn't think I was ugly I was soo complimented I didn't want to watch watching Lenny fuck someone and not being able to be involved wanting to would blow me Mark kept pushing Lenny telling me to go into the livingroom Lenny didn't want me there Ronny came in bill blass jumpsuit blue with a thin white belt Bill Blass scarf my my richies Hanky Panky crackers from Boston I ate one and didn't like it Mark wanted to go back to the livingroom I wanted to get out of there back to the cats I prefer gay guys because I'm not under pressure constantly to fuck them watch if my clothing's always closed which it's not I was feeling anamalous Mark started saying the mattress in the waterbed on the waterbed is torn I have to fix it he even threaded a real needle Lenny can you help me Ronny's cracking ridiculous jokes Mark's done it so often he even has it timed Mark says you can watch Ronny's not a voyeur we watch Rat-Race Debbie Schmereynolds an incredibly creepy flic in which Debbie's a good girl who'd rather give up her guy than prostitute I don't remember if she's living with him in sin it was very romantic Ronny and I were finally talking Johnny Carson turned on crude gags about hookers drag

queens everyone's one for fun I'm learning about Middle America the whole place is mad I'm cold to Lenny don't admit I am which is nasty I want to see my cats Mark has one Tiffany she's seven weeks pregnant and crawls through almost closed windows and bars no one else comes it was a party not even Mickey Mark said that Mickey would be very upset if he knew that Mark slept with anyone else Mark would if Mickey did it's quite nutty there's this rich guy Jack who's been supporting Mark still is? they have an expensive looking place not much furniture yet no books of course we're open for any garbage I get pissed off when Mark kisses me and calls me a girl he's upset I am I try to relax rub him good-night Lenny's acting like he's lost his mind we get a ride with this dope seller creep doesn't know why anyone would live in a commune not enough money to the 8th street subway this is the first dream sequence 1:17 I have to go out for the rest of the day get my hair cut again thank god

last night with Mary was a complete failure I couldn't understand what she was saying I've never seen any Wharol films I felt she was deaf was I supposed to fuck her Harriet's work was gorgeous eccentric Beardsley one interpretation could be that I was manic and Mary was uptight me babbling I could be far from reality I don't know no one is willing to come close enough to tell me why the fuck should they I wouldn't be my ugly self Mary might have been very shy and into herself I got smashed and watched T.V. was she smashed she said so at one point I don't know when anyone's putting me on anymore lying to me Melvin wrote me he can't live with Wilma with any girl? anyone? for any length of

time my basic problem is I can't quite believe anything and can't react to anything similarly I never react to things when they happen but only later when they're less threatening Jeffrey's probably dying Seeley unable to be political which was his life for the past four years when Melvin was here at Christmas he wanted to sleep with us I told Lenny no before when Lenny asked me Lenny said yee--h I personally had been avoiding sleeping with him for the past year they went into the bedroom 2:00 in the morning bloody cold I smoked half an ounce of pot couldn't get high it was shitting cold Lenny wanted to go to sleep kept bitching at me to get into the fucking bed I took off my bluejeans finally had a thick black and white diamond bodystocking on under it and sat on the bed between their legs I tried to think about how warm they were in the bed not me I couldn't adjust to coldly stripping fucking Melvin the first time we'd been too close we kept wondering if we should sleep in other beds various arrangements Susie Rosenberg about 6:00 I managed to get in and take the rest of my clothes off you wouldn't know I did it for a living we were going to play ghost for the next week Melvin acted like a complete shit we saw him once more he was going to sleep with us brought us free food he'd call up Mary we'd all go to Mary's Lenny was feeling shitty working all day Melvin had his father's car so we didn't have to take the subway he decided to stay at Mary's we bitched Lenny was dead tired he gave us a ride home free radio Melvin isn't even that good in bed very rough Mary doesn't like his cock he's going nuts about Jeffrey told us later I finally agreed to speak with him on the telephone he had gone back to Mary's had a fight with her about going to 3000 parties Mary said that he came over on New Year's Eve three days later acted abominably god knows I feel closer to him today Bob calls

up I have to work tonight the new couple fucked maybe tomorrow night he doesn't know he's sooo busy maybe I won't be able to train another couple in time hah ten easy steps to Hollywood bare the vagina destroy yourself he couldn't be bothered a couple of nights' work he makes me puke I can't work in such hell I call up Mark at his house he'll do the show whenever I want nights (he works days) I need Bob's crap like a hole in my head soon I can get back to sleep Bob was blabbing about my using someone else would they know what to do of course how to simulate repulsion more money for his fat gullet Lenny didn't leave me some dead tired Bob is disgusting a destroyer of human minds the second dream sequence written at 11:40 I'm feeling like shit get along with Hannah (I am) I can't cite down peacocks my nightmares all these invulnerable thoughts my great beauty I can try to talk to Hannah third dream tomorrow tell her Lenny says she's scared I should do everything to help her relax I want to be alone Greta Garbo Scylla and Charibdis I don't know how to return

I was a young wife last night I was scared that my husband took drugs you smoke a pot cold to sex unless I danced alone knowing that there were fifty other men in the red hotel room I got really hot he kept taking too long blew him he ate me the usual we still had time left so I danced naked Ike and Tina Turner's RESPECT he yelled at me to get on the floor in the doggie position I did immediately got up he said do it you're supposed to do whatever I say I did it looked up at him and went rrrf-rrf rrrrf-rrf the shifts broke up I started crying again I want to go home to mommy you stupid cunt I want to see my mommy you're a brute I don't want

to be married to you any longer O.K. we'll go see your mother I like her too Mark's good at being aggressive a tinge of nastiness they're sadists a good fit I worked easily except for the sex I felt weird with Mark couldn't get into it and fake coming I was more interested in kissing him or looking at his body during the intermission I was talking to Ellen Mark and Mickey were making up she had done tricks for a while three times once a week went up to George Raft's hotel room he had an old-young travelling companion she fucked the companion turning Raft's sex the whole night Raft was nice to her she says told her that she should tell each guy she deals with why should you pay the pimp? agency? I don't remember anything pay me and I'll take the price down \$10. she should also pick two or three guys she trusts to be nice and pay have them as private clientele not deal with strangers she was in a precarious position might get arrested beaten too large a cock and couldn't refuse alone in the room he knew one guy who got off on lying in a coffin and seeing the girl freak out Mark comes up says that he thinks that no one if he didn't feel restrained would be normal weird ways of getting off Lizzy's licking Paul's ears his neck they're fighting with the ball hanging from the scratching post and kissing each other one girl he got so hepped up by his half lying said that she really wanted to blow a guy just as he was about to come for him to ejaculate over her face so she could rub it in a typical porno movie ending Mark repeated to her what she had said it was in a room of people she got uptight immediately left the room I didn't have any trouble getting home Mark and Mickey walked me to the subway station so I could see if anyone was following me the D train came fast the AA I thought two guys were following me up 163rd but nothing happened Lenny and Hannah were asleep I hope Hannah's O.K.

she's strangely quiet and in her room she might have killed herself she just got up I have to speak to her she's cold blaaah naah I was still jumpy wanted to rest eat some bread Lenny had woken up for a sec too conked out I tried to get Melvin worried by his letter the telephone was coocoo crawled into bed with Lenny but couldn't get to sleep for a few hours this is the third dream sequence I'm not going to do anything for the next two days put down my actual dream an affair between me Mark and Lenny in the middle of the morning the joke about the rubbers: my daddy told me never to do it without a rubber whatever that is what are you talking about it's not raining the roof of the hotel room was leaking onto the gold bed long blonde fluffy hair over my cunt

Lenny won't call me La Mort he says he doesn't want to say a name that strange I dig the pun the whole day's been like this: we can't do the old show can't do any show except one which means something to us beyond the bread we make we probably should quit this fucking job the 12:30 show's gone a fuzz appeared about 12:05 saying that the theatre couldn't open until 12:30 the shits make up their own rules anything they crave syphilis wet cunt crap cock puss I Lenny says he'll call me the german for murder murderer? Morda that's better it'll be romantic I won't mind doing the show which is a really shitty show today but with the creeps males chauvinists rednecks pukes John Birchers worse liberals murderers we get in the audience it's a strong show they don't want to see anything but dead cunt they make everything dead with their eyes they're not going to dig any jokes they haven't for three months I come out dance strip do hard

spreads no expression 10 seconds each held still to Ike and Tina Turner's RESPECT dance at the end sadism hands on the hip as they clap Lenny's the Shit Boss Mister Wolf call me Wolf that's real I have to fuck him to get the job dancing in his theatre my boyfriend's been busted etc. at the end I get the job of course we have to write a better 10-minute conversation about Bob Wolf I hate giving these fuckers spreads opening myself but we have to do the truth we might as well begin acting that way our romanticism a guy comes over here to use the sugar I jump Lenny asks if I got scared I'm always scared whenever now strange guys come over to talk to me we see Mark and Mickey in the afternoon in the middle of the third show I say there's a friend of mine hello the only line the audience digs they're tripping more tea in my cup Mark stares at the stage lights my yellow socks and red and blue shoes I have to talk to Lenny the Embers again confusion we have to speak loud and very distinctly because the lines are symbols real there ain't no conversation O.K. the audience digs the sadism bastards pimps every male's a pimp in this cruddy society caters to his lousy moneyed disease you get fed it from birth and can't get away except by severe disruption I'm a pervert a sneak I dig buying clothes nothing else the harder the cut the better I get confused about what people expect me to do I'm talking French today an Italian waiter asks me what I'm writing I start answering him in French Lenny says he's good-looking I agree in my head but not turned on I never am I sound like I'm in the 50's not here on 42nd street I like people who say things I haven't heard before that's shit Mark was saying that he hates earning money he has to figure out how to maintain it living he's scared to walk around in the streets with money anymore he gives it to Mickey great solution Mickey's laughing so hard he looks

like he's an epileptic Mark's calling him she which is true they're getting deeper and deeper Mark wants to know if he's talking too loud he tries to be silent and actually is seven minutes he felt bad watching me on the stage all the shits cared about was my cunt they moved as I moved so they wouldn't miss a glimpse light meat they can't now he can't be around 42nd street he wants the bread to furnish his apartment acid doesn't last forever 100 tabs a day and an empty forest he'd be happy forever: the paradise I eat raw fish and chicken Lenny tempura and fish with soy sauce and ginger it's worth \$13. half a dirty show the waitresses won't go near Mark and Mickey who are giggling like babies wanting to touch each other Mark says he likes Kali's dancing the best he'd like to work with her only she isn't as good with the audience as I am I feel hurt like the guy who told Lenny he didn't like my body then saw me sitting behind and ran like a frightened rat Mark's bluntness makes me easy around him I wouldn't commit myself to him in some dream or reality caused by a dream he and Mickey start saying that a woman should be subservient to a man it's only in America that women lead can lead the men around Mark's not a man he's not involved after chopping wood all day in the forest the man throws open the door of the cabin yells where's my dinner the woman cowers rushes to get it the vegetables not cooked right he throws her against the door we're all getting into it the restaurant's aghast take your clothes off wash my feet warm the shitting bed he'll throw her to the dogs howling in the darkness just beyond the closed door Mark says that if we took the bed offstage and substituted the low Japanese table Lenny could eat me with chopsticks oriental dish

I had been taking trains back and forth I had taken the wrong train past 159th street the Bronx? into country and had to get back it was only possible by transferring twice one stop at Columbia a library beautiful green and old red and white stones the bus passed by the steps along a narrow street I could get stuck there I got out at a department store six floors high I saw something I wanted then second-hand leather culottes very narrow until the hips where there was an exaggerated flare wider than a skirt hem for each leg with a thick band of green elastic around the bottom a saleswoman was showing another customer how stretchable the legs were I went up to the sixth floor to find the clothes there was a huge center room small rooms around it some contained colored fish tanks some were boutiques there were these skimpy dresses in one boutique elastic provided a thick waist tweed flowing lines very short surprisingly close-fit I tried a skirt on kept trying to find the culottes but I couldn't the clothes might have been too expensive Lenny was urging me to go saying what I already knew the last bus would leave at any minute I 'd never be able to return I was going crazy wanting to get something before I couldn't anymore the culottes were missing we were just about to leave I was cold knew that I should get up to put something on I heard the door fumbling I had locked it from the inside scared that Hannah couldn't get in I opened it this woman came in slowly a large smile a Japanese face I couldn't back up she could have had a gun she looked a bit like Hannah a bright yellow and red I didn't see the other colors horizontal stripes a wide-knit dress to the floor she kept coming almost gliding forward her smile was terrifying there might have been a gun in her hand she might be robbing me wanting to kill me I am aware

I can't get away I knew these girls who were whores old college friends they were being shoved around by their pimp I was doing similar work but not as bad it was a grey-brown street similarly colored air the beginning of night their flesh was thick white and sick-looking I noticed it had become that way since they started doing that work one girl huge buttocks in blue stretch pants said to the others that she had gotten a job being a maid she couldn't wait she could be alone with him the other two said she should watch out she might get in trouble they were being brainwashed by Bob Wolf I went into my door a few steps away I'm on a train something prostitution Bob Wolf one lean blonde woman about my age I also used to know her at Brandeis is telling two young girls one lying down with a heavy dark blue knit thing over her stomach how to be hippies or revolutionaries they have to break off all ties learn not to want lots of money I'm almost equal to her but not yet one girl says she has angus there's a murder one hepatitis she's the sickest it seems one with colitis I tell the one with colitis that if she really had colitis she'd be screaming in pain I've had it she has to have something else maybe a spastic colon they're all infectious diseases they might get each other sicker they were also connected to Bob Wolf prostitution it wasn't so upsetting since they could still think were becoming revolutionaries the train was moving out of there before that I had to get through a snow tunnel Elizabeth was a male was going down I was in a room wanted to make this guy much younger than me his mother was coming Bernie whom I had actually known almost slept with a student of mine in San Diego Mark and Mickey trying to touch each other a huge reddish cock standing upright I wanted to watch also touch I wasn't a homosexual and couldn't fit in

had to go to work yesterday Josie's boyfriend Ralph got busted by the feds they broke down the door ripped the apartment apart T.V. bed furniture they arrested everyone in the place then waited for a few hours arresting everyone who buzzed the bell Ralph tried to escape so they shot him in the arm no one fixed his wound when he got to prison so he would have died if it hadn't been for the inmates \$10,000. bail \$5,000. had to be raised in cash. Josie had \$1500. in the bank the feds took her bankbook so she couldn't get at the dough they didn't find the \$2,000. hidden in the stove she's been going cocoo trying to raise the rest of the dough before they kick Ralph off he's going to skip bail as soon as he can he's been arrested too many times before she was going to prostitute Marty was in the theatre she told him Ralph had been busted what could she do to raise bail she'd do anything Marty said what for drugs? I'm not going to do shit for no drug dealer I don't want no drugs in this theatre he's not a drug dealer he's a psychedelic love-freak dealer Ken had told us on Christmas Marty gave him his \$100. coke-snorters as presents Josie comes in every day sunk on barbiturates higher on dope Mark and Mickey are arguing Mark's pissed off he can't freely pick up anyone he wants to mainly guys some guy says to Mickey bye Mick Mark blows a gut how dare you talk to someone tell him your name you have no right to talk to anyone about our problems don't get the actors uptight blah blah he can't do the show anymore he wants us to do all of the work dance for 15 minutes seduce him when he comes on stage don't say a word god forbid he should have to think of a joke to crack I'm not going to take that kind of shit he makes the same money I do I tell him

get someone else to do the show Ellen and I switch which isn't fair to Ellen but she takes shit all the time I get back for the 2:30 show Bob Wolf Big Shit Boss is standing in the back his hair's down to his shoulders to show that he's a hippy and loves everyone he wants to speak to me in an ominous tone I tell Mark start first what the fuck do you mean by almost quitting you can't walk out on a show I won't take that sort of crap I tell him very slowly controlling myself as much as possible to talk and not just to hit him I hate his guts so much the first and second shows on Sunday there's broken glass in the bed it's raining through the roof on the floor where I have to dance and on the bed so I'm working all day in sopping wet clothes and I'm overheated the rug's torn where I dance I keep tripping almost breaking my neck there's no music the place stinks the bedspread's turned brown it's so fucking filthy he starts screaming at me what right do you have to quit you just get out I don't need you you can't get out whenever you please I've tripled audiences on Sundays we've paid you we've never done nothing to you I'm going to quit unless you fix that stage up in two weeks I'm not taking shit you've got my two weeks' notice get the hell out just give me notice get the hell out who are you to threaten me I'm not threatening you I'm telling you point-blank clean this turd fuck shit up Reggie came over last night he and Lenny were going to work for a few hours then we'd all eat dinner I got some wine and cheese for the moment Lenny was sitting on Reggie's lap kissing him they went into the bedroom Lenny told me Reggie said he didn't want to be alone with Lenny anymore Lenny called me could I come into the bedroom I had to peel vegetables but it could wait Lenny was reading a Paul Bowles' story a guy is hot for his son finds out his son's homo and blows a gasket they both go off to Havana I was lying

beside Reggie smelling his skin and barely touching him I got into it really hot so I got up to go to the kitchen masturbate in a little privacy they all came in why'd you get up so I told Lenny I was hot for Reggie so Lenny wouldn't think I was bored with his reading Reggie seemed hurt I was talking in a low voice to Lenny I explained he acted nice kissed me we were in bed Reggie fucking me much you have to become a criminal or a pervert I'm in the bathtub touching the bones in my face I have no idea what I feel like I never touch myself except for occasionally masturbating a few times stick a finger up my asshole or lick my nipple I draw my fingers around the back of my neck I want to shave my hair off again toes knees I admire criminals in my head knowing they're shits businessmen motherfuckers like everyone else I don't want to fuck it doesn't mean what it should no one else thinks like this anymore I say angelic I'm sick of fucking not knowing who I am

I don't know who my father was. I don't know if my mother was married or not. I don't know if she wanted to have me or not. I don't know if she showed me she wanted me or not when I was a child but I presume from irrational beliefs deep within me that she didn't. I loved my mother deeply when I was a child I played mainly with her when she was in a good mood baffled by her alternating moods I relied only on her. she always got along with and loved my half-sister more than me though I am much more like her I look exactly like her. she has black hair and green eyes when she was young she was beautiful wild. I imagine that she married my adopted father when I was a year old because she had been thoroughly scared she wanted a man who would always be dead and not desert her she didn't want to do anything again. she gave back to my grandmother the quarter of a million or so she had inherited from her father so that her mother would still support her her mother was dictatorial and beautiful. my mother hated my adopted father she trained me and my sister to laugh at him when he was around to bait him. my sister and my mother used to sit on the bed naked watching T.V. I would sit on the floor in front of the bed I found out when I was older that my adopted father never fucked my mother he thought they were too old. my mother hated my father's guts and all men I myself do not like him.

DOWN WITH THE FAMILY THE FAMILY IS THE WORST EVIL
IN THIS COUNTRY IT IS THE CAUSE OF EVIL EVERYWHERE

GHOST STORY

President Nixon is fucking his wife Mrs. Nixon he sticks his red cock into her body he touches her face. there is a four-star emergency in the room. there's another war they have to destroy the world. they use pure horse and hallucinogens because they want to have more pretty colors. they have cramps they are very sick they cannot function they are stuck in a small room with paisley spreads curtains radios tensor beams. they can meditate and they can destroy what they want. they can make a world which is sexually wonderful to live in exciting athletically stimulating. there is always a new activity or interest and they are never bored they know what they want and they are getting it. they have even remade themselves and they operate perfectly they will never be able to be matched by anyone. they have made all the rapes and distorted murders they have made us into maniacs. they want us to worship them. they make us unable to exist.

POLITICAL DESIRE

letters from an anarchist: Nixon knows his death is the death of the world. always think the negative. moreover the bourgeoisie have disappeared though no one's yet noticed it there are ten rich bastard-creeps and living robots. nobody talks double talk except the N.Y. Post and The New York Review of Books everyone knows what's coming off. there are hidden events the wheeling dealing selling destroying of each country back and forth the rich become easily bored the invention of new man-animal-plant destructions slow spindling torture sex is dull there's only one kind of pleasure. what do I want? Wallace speaks sense listen to him he's a maniac and so am I Nixon also speaks sense spread your legs shut your trap. your cunt is pretty colors. I want your cunt I want you to die because I'm going to inherit your money I'm going to be able to eat and write as much as I want. I'm writing this and that's a joke I could at this time be blowing off Nixon's legs sucking cock. I could commit suicide. in the next 20 minutes I'm going to eat an abricot tart drink a glass of lotus root tea. will M. call me up? will L. come home? he's being mugged by a fuzz who thought he was a woman then he's robbed and beaten by three hustlers who think he's screwing them. he goes and pisses down a drain so another fuzz takes him in beats him up for not taking junk. now he has three cocks he uses one as a sledgehammer to prove he's female.

POLITICAL DESIRE

SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL FOR MARGIE

I tried to rush through but I couldn't make it. not to stick in. do it for you say I love you. if we blow up the world if we attack Nixon he'll blow up the world. he thinks his death is the death of the world. if we attack syntax or surrounding possibilities the rich are not going to give up their money. if we write fuck we are helping the ongoing disgust insanity. don't fool myself what I'm doing now isn't going to change shit. make one person happier. Get rid of the goddamn fuckers get rid of them before they get rid of us bomb this world destroy each and every dogsucker plimp this is in the mind no one's eating no one's able to piss in privacy now we've decided not to hate the rich lollipops. we can say anything we want to say and we can do anything we want to do we can kill anybody we can commit suicide in most cases we will gladly take junk whatever dope is offered to us we come enormous amounts. this is all beautiful aphrodisia green and red liquid poured on top of meat hormones now increase the size and capacities of our will. what do I want? you not you warmth to be let alone not to be let alone in my blue jeans and blue jean jacket angels proclaiming the ascendancy of Mao the tyrant the destruction of all T.V. and children turnips artichokes goat cheese Mu tea arise from the good earth.

Mother who is good to us all and very cruel come down no
cocks, cocks in each hand sprouting out of each toe like dried
red Indian corn harvest in this city of only garbage and heavy
metal and cloth down to us needing you every night dreaming of
you holding you in our arms suckling your breasts as we used to
and now you sucking ours we go through your passageway out
of uncertainty a young girl waiting at the end look in the mirror
what does our cunt look like cunt into cunt and around cunt take
her and sleep with her meet her and sleep with her do not live
completely in fantasy do not go with him expecting a hermaphro-
ditic change now is the time the smells: sharp, bitter, thick,
very salty the ideas: too much desire to stop trembling, fear,
distaste, need hidden memories

waiting for the right moment to start (the right event to happen).
almost Christmas heard from many evil people.

jewels. old horses trampling through the windows. third. a third
of one day made into a small old wood table with a lamp upon it
whose shade is yellow and in one spot torn. only women. a full
day. the yellow cabinets crying a green and white floor lined with
dirt. a farmer comes running in with a large pitchfork. help night.
I decide I am strong. key hangs from light bulb. telephone on purple
rug. ghosts and angels creep over the rug. there are all jewels.
bottles of wine and cats' faces and powder on the podium. hell.
an old house in which there's a sofa three tables a broken piano
that's about to be given away pictures two lamps one bed with a
curled iron grating and high legs a high rusted bathtub some red
rugs and a doormat. the cats get into the clouds. doorknobs turn
away loosen exposing the fears. velvets and silks and thick hand-
made cottons and linens and crepes and wools. bands of caviar
and large peaches red in their insides smoked fish cheeses breads
creams soft eggs. the road is covered with fallen wood. refrigera-
tors are desired. a shoe or a casket. a way of fur and ivory.

This text was published as a stapled chapbook by “Papyrus Press” in May 1972 (according to the title page). It’s unpaginated. We transcribed it from two identical copies, one kept at Duke University Library and the other at the Gay and Lesbian Center – San Francisco Public Library.

The blank pages belong to the original edition.

It was partially republished by Semiotext(e) in *Hannibal Lecter, My Father*, Kathy Acker, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, Native Agents Series, 1991, p. 25-35. In that volume the text is misdated, giving the manuscript the date of 1968, and it is described as “unpublished” (the effort to reinvent the text’s origins can tell us how important dates were to Acker, and how much history mattered to the publishers...).¹ It only includes the part running from “the filthy bedcover on stage” to “fucking not knowing who I am”, which misleads interpretation as it narrows the focus of the book to the parts on sex work, thus reducing the potential meaning of “politics” that the book presents. Later on, in *After Kathy Acker*, Chris Kraus strangely dates the text from July-August 1972 while Acker was in San Diego visiting; to substantiate her statement she writes: “She typed up the text, double-spaced, adding the colophon Papyrus Press, San Diego 1972, and brought it to an offset printer”.² There is no such colophon in *Politics*, the title page only bears published by/ Papyrus Press/ May 1972, moreover the double-spaces were already in 1971 *Section from DIARY*, that’s not what she added. As Kraus, seemingly, only checked the text in the Semiotext(e) edition, she wasn’t aware of the content of the title page in the original 1972 edition.

Politics draws a substantial part of its material from 1971 *Section from DIARY*. But close comparison shows it doesn’t simply cut and paste, it rewrites and reorders the passages of the earlier text, mixing it with more recent materials. Roughly, the book is comprised of four layers of text: January-February 1971 diary materials, text from July 1971 *Portraits* and similar, ca. Christmas 1971 diary-like material, and finally text from ca. April or May of 1972: a series of short experimental proses pieces similar to the ones that make up *The Burning Bombing of America: The Destruction of the U.S.* The original manuscript/typescript was written probably in New York City, probably between the winter of 1971 and May of 1972.

Notes:

150 **Politics** The title “Politics” is one important input Acker gave to this montage of texts, some older and some newer. It seems Acker’s experiences between 1970 and 1972 gave both a more practical and a more varied understanding of sexual politics. Her sensitivity to power relations was heightened. Instead of using the expression that gave its title to Kate Millet’s seminal 1974 essay *Sexual Politics*, Acker would later talk about “street politics,” underlining the importance the context and the practical

1. The 1968 date is also adopted by the editors of *Essential Acker: the selected writings of Kathy Acker*, Grove Press, 2002.

2. Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 65.

dimension of this learning had for her: [the sex show] changed me mainly in two ways: one, it changed my politics. When I was in university I was sort of SDS, but the student Left was a very elitist thing. The 42nd Street experience made me learn about street politics. It's not that I was that interested in sex, it more gave me a viewpoint of whatever goes on in actuality through the kind of sexual perspective. I think Genet has the same kind of perspective. You see people from the bottom up, and sexual behavior, especially sex minus relationship, which is what happens in 42nd Street, is definitely bottom. Then you see it in a different way, especially power relationships in society. And I think that perspective never left me.¹ If Acker's political intention for the text was clear, whether or not the text was effective as a literary creation wasn't as obvious to her. As she writes in the fragment "Political Desire / Something Beautiful For Margie", attacking Nixon would provoke the end of the world, while attacking syntax wouldn't force the rich to give their money, and writing and fucking would probably only further the general alienation: don't fool myself what I'm doing now isn't going to change shit. make one person happier. (cf. supra, p. 178).

150 Politics In 1989, Acker talks about *Politics*, holding it against her 1988 book *Empire of the Senseless* to show a shift in her process: from a kind of "look at all this shit" documentation to a "where can we go now" dive into mythology and (proto-new) narrative play. She writes, "When I wrote my first book, *Politics*, I was living in a society that was politically and socially hypocritical. According to the media back then, politicians were men who said sweet things to babies and neither adultery nor drug abuse ever came near a middle-class white American home. / Perhaps our society is now in a 'post-cynical' phase. Certainly, I thought as I started *Empire*, there's no more need to deconstruct, to take apart perceptual habits, to reveal the frauds on which our society's living. We now have to find somewhere to go, a belief, a myth. Somewhere real."² [CF]

152 she tried her best This page is featured in 1971 *Portraits*, cf. supra, p. 114.

162 Melvin Melvin Freilicher. According to Freilicher, he and Kathy met at Brandeis University in 1964, where she was studying classics and he was studying psychology.³

173 I'm sick of fucking not knowing who I am These words are given by Chris Kraus as the last lines of *Politics* in the version that she was reading for her Acker biography. This chapbook version shows that that line comes more near the middle of the text – but it's still stands out as a shiny beacon kind of sentence, a precursor for the upcoming serial projects and the type of sentence that Acker will use to create them. She

1. Interview of Acker by Sylvère Lotringer ("Devoured by Myths"), unexpurgated transcript, 1989-1990, in Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Melville House, 2018, p. 73.

2. K. Acker, "On Two of My Texts," *Bodies of Work*, London: Serpent's Tail, 1997 (1989).

3. "In Memoriam Kathy Acker, Melvin Freilicher talks about his friend Kathy Acker", interview by Glenn Gossling, posted on June 29, 2017, on <www.glennngossling.wixsite.com/kathyacker/single-post/2016/06/29/Mel-Freilicher-talks-about-his-friend-Kathy-Acker> [accessed on July 9, 2019].

begins *The Childlike Life...* with an answer to that question, or her own kind of fabricated literary product of an answer: "I become a murderess."¹ Or actually, in that book she's fabricating with INTENTION: she's becoming a murderess! The beginning of *Rip-off Red, Girl Detective*, she again starts with a version of "I am," but does it with the (faux & real) factual accumulative runons she's been perfecting in *DIARY* and now playing with in *Politics*: "I'm five foot three inches brown hair curling all over my face, bright green eyes, I'm 26 but my body's tough from dancing if you know what I mean—well I got bored doing a strip, well first, I got bored doing that Ph.D. shit and being frustrated professors' straight-A pet, especially being faithful to a husband who spent all his time in bed dealing out poker hands; I left school, descended to the more interesting depths and became a stripper, even that finally bored me, so I decided, on my 26th birthday, to become the toughest detective alive." [cf]

175 DOWN WITH THE FAMILY "The family has always been the privileged place of women's exploitation" (Luce Irigaray).² The central part of *Politics* is framed between two series of fragments, each containing an evocation of the family that focuses on the loved-hated mother figure (child friend enemy authoritarian ghost). The book could thus posit the connection between the experience of sex work, and the sexual politics and sexual anxieties (focused around the mother), which characterize the family frame. The fact that the chapbook opens on a lesbian sex scene, and closes to the fantasy of the "girl" meeting the mythical womblike all-satisfying "Mother", could suggest she is making a link between Mother figure issues and lesbianism. Such an example would support the idea that Acker was likely influenced by dominant (homophobic) psychoanalytic discourse from her time.

177 POLITICAL DESIRE Nixon also speaks sense spread your legs shut your trap your cunt is pretty colors. I want your cunt I want you to die because I'm going to inherit your money I'm going to be able to eat and write as much as I want... I'm going to eat an abricot tart drink a glass of lotus root tea. The fabric of desire and consumption is made up of the internal (feeling, digestion) crossing the external (politicians, speech). There is no true divide between what you eat and what's happening around you. In this porosity, everything exists within the libidinal. Poet Lyn Hejinian writes in her essay "The Rejection of Closure" that

It is not hard to discover devices—structural devices—that may serve to 'open' a poetic text, depending on other elements in the work and by all means on the intention of the writer. One set of such devices has to do with arrangement and, particularly, with rearrangement within a work. The "open text," by definition, is open to the world and particularly to the reader. It invites participation, rejects the authority of the writer over the reader and thus, by analogy, the authority implicit in other (social, economic, cultural) hierarchies. It speaks for writing that

1. *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula by the Black Tarantula*, in *Portrait of an Eye*, New York: Grove Press, 1992 (1974), p. 3.

2. Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, "Questions" (transcription of a seminar at Toulouse in March 1975), éd. Minuit (Paris), 1977, p. 139-140 (our translation).

is generative rather than directive. The writer relinquishes total control and challenges authority as a principle and control as a motive. The “open text” often emphasizes or foregrounds process, either the process of the original composition or of subsequent compositions by readers, and thus resists the cultural tendencies that seek to identify and fix material, turn it into a product; that is, it resists reduction. / It is really a question of another economy which diverts the linearity of a project, undermines the target-object of a desire, explodes the polarization of desire on only one pleasure, and disconcerts fidelity to only one discourse. Luce Irigaray.¹

As Hejninian notes, the open text read in a feminist way offers another economy, a radical redoing of form, subjectivity within that form. “Economy” here can be thought of as a libidinal economy: a meeting of the psychoanalytic concept of desire and where that collides with a body, in this case a writing body. What we get is an open form. *Politics*, where we get the nonstop addition of experience, feeling, political news, fantasy, and observation – from narrators real, observed, and imagined – functions to effectively create the libidinal economy of the “open text.” [CF]

179 Mother This mythical figure of the “Mother” appears also in *The Burning Bombing of America...* (probably written ca. April-May 1972, while *Politics* was being finished²), in the part titled “Personal Life”, which is one of the early 70’s texts of Acker’s that is the most explicitly concerned with the problem of attributed-gender, gender difference and resistance to gender-based domination. In that text “Mother” is named “Earth Mother” and “Mother of Skies”³, but the interaction of the narrator with this obviously named Mother is much more reduced in “Personal Life” than it is in *Politics*. Parallels existing between the two nevertheless do allow us to perform new readings of some passages. The sentence **cocks in each hand sprouting of each toe** is echoed by the **giants come out of the caves** **giant dildos strapped to their thighs**⁴. To figure a body beyond sexual gender in a world beyond humanist modernity, Acker – as she will do extensively in her later work – resorts to myth. The mythical Mother seems to act here as the guide, the psychopomp, that helps women to exorcise themselves from the remainders of a primitive moment of gender identification. Sex is then open for interpretation, and freed from the family scenery. Cunt as a signifier breaks away from the phallus: **what does our cunt look like cunt into cunt and around cunt**. Writing could thus ideally act as a spell to cancel the power of social/historical determinations, and to reclaim control of oneself. But what Acker shows, for example in *Burning Bombing...*, is that writing mainly allows the author and the character to remain in paradox, paradox between feeling determined/dominated and believing in the power to take back control.

1. Lyn Hejninian, “The Rejection of Closure,” *Poetics* 4, 1984.

2. The date “5/72” appears in the middle of the text; cf. *The Burning Bombing of America: The Destruction of the U.S.*, April-May 1972, Grove Press, 2002, p. 156.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

Power, also, to reverse the signifiers of capitalist patriarchy into signifiers of strength and real weapons:

it is necessary decide you are female. Women <—> then <—> women. men
are humans who are bred trained they can do anything they are al-
mighty they must not be concerned with daily life. their essence is rape.
their desire is murder. they are forced to destroy. sexual gender not
exist. you do what you want. write as you live. ' [...]
to be female wo-man is alone constantly on guard as inde-
pendent as possible always prepared to be without shelter pos-
sibilities of talk a secret language daily language to be various ways
and talk various ways are strong weapons live a life which is secret
to nonwomen who live otherwise the only way in which to be wom-
en is to act in certain ways to think in certain ways sexual gender
no longer exists to know you have to be strong at every moment to
be able to talk to X each other without having to puzzle what to
say without having to plan how to control X you are always your
own home your love the child the mother and the father it is
necessary for the survival of earth perhaps universe life that more
all humans become decide women effeminacy fem twine we
must be mentally masturbatory in the mountains the caves a
foot below the waters of the canyons the cockroach cities you
must act out there is no more choice I am going to die whatever
I do I We are related to the huge strong-limbed giants in the
moon.²

1. *The Burning Bombing of America: The Destruction of the U.S.*, April-May 1972, Grove Press, 2002, p. 190-191.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 190. In the original this excerpt is actually placed before the first one above.

For H.

kathy acker

(ca. 5/1972; pub. winter 1974)

And then the City arises rises from your cunt
golden star there are no buildings but silk and thick
cotton tents animals deer with hands for legs run
down the pavilions people with them at the same rate.
there are no families but centers warm breast
living person when I need to have my muscles lifted out
placed on a flat surface rubbed I need to have socks
put on my feet by L. so by the morning I fall asleep no
families ruin the hearts of women and men by forcing them
through torture to desire outlawed desires you are
healthy again you are able to run with two legs the
doctor who killed you has stopped killing you what of the
politicians what of the layer of weapons like streams
hidden beneath the streets \$ has become an image \$ has
become an illusion dream followed by 1% of the population
bad acid-speed no drugs are necessary L. and I no longer
fuck what will happen in one week? the new City arises
I place diamonds in the hair of your cunt you who I can
desire birds with red and purple feathers grow out of the
branches of trees on one small tree one inch below each
branch hang strings of yellow flowers berries and tea
for breakfast huge peaches savory grass heartsease
purple basil rue tansy (poison) laurel cinnamon
olive tree lambs' ears quince spearmint parsely
curled mint forget-me-nots rosemary summer savory
wild grass chives bloom into purple flowers we are
extremely irritable it becomes easier not to deal with
people to tell people we're not home we find it difficult

to stay alive in the distance to the left the old
witch ran after us a huge stick surrounded by metal spikes
in her hand she changed into a small white bird a huge
fish in the pond we had to jump across a fat townsman
tried to make his horses kill us tried to flay open our
flesh with thin whips worms came out of our ass a beggar
asked for help who are we to believe for a second the
town opened its gate we ran inside to a small building
a deer served us a falcon bid us good-day we no
longer want to be human it is simple: you need
another operation they're trying to kill you
because you're poor the poor live outside the law.
our cunts are silver daggers we shall live in a new
world

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The text reproduced here is a 1-page poem, published in Tree, #4, winter 1974, ed. by David Meltzer, p. 42.

The same text, but without being divided into verses, figures in The Burning Bombing of America: The Destruction of the U.S. as part of the section “Diary II” but under the title “(for L.)”.¹ This leads us to date it differently than what is written in the Fales catalogue (ca. 1968-1971). As The Burning Bombing... seems to us to have been written ca. May 1972, while and after Politics was being finished, we conclude that this version of For H. was finished at the same period in New York City; yet, a first manuscript version could well have been composed in 1968-1971.

Notes:

189 our cunts are silver daggers we shall live in a new world These are words for a cunt revolt. In this series of poetic works from the summer of 1972, Acker’s writing in blasted-apart word fragments, separated by end-spaces (a period followed by a longer space), or by un-punctuated word groups which drift down the page in a misty column.

In Georgina Colby’s excellent study of Acker’s process, based on a study of the materials in the Duke University archives, she is particularly interested in how Acker works up a visual practice that continually informs and virally injects through the writing.² Part of Colby’s argument is that the main archived pieces, like the dream maps which Acker includes in Blood and Guts..., or the traced and modified weird mutated illustrations that she puts into In Memoriam for Identity, are way more material than we can get a sense of by just reading the books. The maps, for example, are huge – the size of a whole table, way bigger than what we see shrunk down to a two-page spread in the book. These poems predate the official published visual work, but we can see Acker getting into an exploration of space, trying to create a dreamlike architecture for the revolution using only visual words as material. In this summer of ’72 it’s like we’re watching her test out of the limits of what kind of space you can make on the page, by seeing her push apart components of the poem, scattering them through blank space and creating a visual field punctuated by little rocks of image: maybe these flashes, bits of raw language material, are another way that we can think about her word “jewels.”

I also wanted to accompany this archival Acker piece, and those directly following it, with an excerpt of a text by the lesbian Chicana scholar, activist and writer Gloria Anzaldúa. I’m reading the Acker work in this period as experiments in revolutionary space, or how to work with space evoked both materially through poetic form and immaterially through the invocation of transformation. But I want to put the transformative material and political work that Acker’s doing in the 1970s next to Anzaldúa’s letter from

1. The Burning Bombing of America: The Destruction of the U.S., April-May 1972, Grove Press, 2002, p. 162-163.

2. Georgina Colby, Kathy Acker: Writing the Impossible, Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2016.

1980, where Anzaldúa talks about the specific invisibilization of female and lesbian third-world writers by female and feminist writers. Acker and Anzaldúa share a belief in the material power of words and writing as a transformational practice (both personally and politically), and both pay attention to write with a language that is almost conversational, in some places intentionally bare of intellectually coded literary style. Yet Anzaldúa's text points to the fact that the radical quality of experimental writing by white female or afab authors comes from a different embodied practice, one which exists mainly in relation to historical male experimentation. As a result, this white feminist experimental tradition not only doesn't necessarily recognize its particularity, but also pushes writing by women of color further away from the visible, making these works even harder to find and to recognize. From Gloria Anzaldúa, "Speaking in Tongues":

Dear mujeres de color, companions in writing--...

My dear hermanas, the dangers we face as women writers of color are not the same as those of white women, though we have many in common. We don't have much to lose—we never had any privileges. I wanted to call the dangers 'obstacles,' but that would be kind of lying. We can't transcend the dangers, can't rise above them. We must go through them and hope we won't have to repeat the performance. [...] Unlikely to be friends of people in high literary places, the beginning woman of color is invisible in both the white male mainstream world and in the white women's feminist world, though in the latter this is gradually changing. The lesbian of color is not only invisible, she doesn't even exist. Our speech, too, is inaudible. We speak in tongues like the outcast and the insane [...] Who gave us permission to perform the act of writing? Why does writing seem so unnatural to me? I'll do anything to postpone it—empty the trash, answer the telephone. The voice recurs in me: Who am I, a poor Chicanita from the sticks, to think I could write? How dare I even considered becoming a writer as I stooped over the tomato fields bending, bending under the hot sun, hands broadened and calloused, not fit to hold the quill, numbed into an animal stupor by the heat.

How hard it is for us to think we can choose to become writers, much less feel and believe that we can. What have we to contribute, to give? Our own expectations condition us. Does not our class, our culture, as well as the white man tell us writing is not for women such as us?

[...] The Third World Woman revolts: We revoke, we erase your white male imprint. When you came knocking on our doors with your rubber stamps to brand our faces with DUMB, HYSTERICAL, PASSIVE PUTA, PERVERT, when you come with your branding irons to burn MY PROPERTY on our buttocks, we will vomit the guilt, self-denial, and race-hatred you have force-fed us right back into your mouth. We are done being cushions for your projected fears. We are tired of being your sacrificial lambs and scapegoats. [...] Why am I compelled to write? Because the

writing saves me from this complacency I fear. Because I have no choice. Because I must keep the spirit of my revolt and myself alive. Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write because life does not appease my appetites and hunger. I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to achieve self-autonomy. To dispel the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul. To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit. To show that I can and that I will write, never mind their admonitions to the contrary. And I will write about the unmentionables, never mind the outraged gasp of the censor and the audience. Finally, I write because I'm scared of writing but I'm more scared of not writing.'

[CF]

1. Gloria Anzaldúa, "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers," *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2009 [1980], pp. 26-30.

Revolutionary Diary of an Anarchist

kathy acker

(ca. 5/1972)

REVOLUTIONARY DIARY OF AN ANARCHIST

murder assassinate destroy burn kidnap drink
mescaline fuck in ass change sex-dress change sex
kill father mother this is the revolutionary diary
of new anarchist total chaos men become violet
women the messages come rapid no time for understanding
no time figure out murders 9:00 P.M. go to
California 1:00 back in New York the cats never
leave they listen to Mick Jagger male chauvinism
results from being woman-in-disguise black woman
vulture white the pirate who can never not
want return there will be several murders in the
streets and alleys the wrecked doorways you will
find clues you personally are involved in everything
Marx said if the capitalists act wrong a total
immediate revolution but the universe will the universe
necessarily change? the sheriff wants to sleep with
me I love you we love you all insane events of
love are now possible anarchist two weeks pass
report from the land of purple birds a thousand secret
loves live in ocean orange sun beer destroys
unwanted mind three novels Kerouac in honor reverence
to B. I love L. black cloaked monsters sneak soft
through the streets California long noses snakes
curl around their faces and through their mouths they
pass in out cars I no longer make bombs the wolves
at times hunt alone sing for pleasure Pleasure! I'm
a man fetish clothes I hitch through Big Sur with H.
we fuck wildly in car B.B. sees us I have nowhere to

go I have to choose one bedfellow five possibilities
let's see the length of your cocks want middle size
pleasure and not get hurt cats curl around your head
stick claws into your eyes their fur brushes over your
thighs you look into the eyes of a cat green eyes look
[2] into you vision I was married three years I got
to dislike fucking A. I've never been loved parents
hated me kid 14 loved when fucked wanted love
wanted fucking hidden universe rages. now often
uncertain I want to fuck. uneven writing. fuck
writing. the vision of self self is related to all
selves animals plants planned nets destructive
actions ~~become total love~~ ~~clear actions~~ are love.
all information is here to be found.

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The text reproduced here is a 2-page typescript, archived at the New York University's Fales Library & Special Collections, Kathy Acker Notebooks, Mss 434 – Box 3 – Folder 15. The pages are unnumbered.

Acker's handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to our pagination.

Our date differs from the one given by the Fales catalogue (ca. 1968-1971). We believe the text needs a different date because 1) of the mentions of the "vulture" (an image Acker used ca. spring-summer 1972);¹ 2) because of the occurrence of the "men become violet/women" ("Violet Women" is a part of *The Burning Bombing of America...*); 3) because the passage "self is related to all / selves animals plants" strongly echoes passages in *The Burning Bombing of America...* (like the striving toward freedom includes animal plants people²); and 4) because of the last sentence, handwritten, which is very similar to Acker's repeated definition of the word "information" in 1972 and 1973 – in which she defines information as a direct transmission of written material, instead of normative fact: writing is the use of information without the source of information³ and Here's the information go fuck yourself⁴.

Notes:

194 you personally are involved in everything / Marx said if the capitalists act wrong a total / immediate revolution but the universe will the universe / necessarily change? This section reminds me so much of this overlooked part in French writer Hélène Cixous's text "The Laugh of the Medusa." People normally read that text as being just about how to write as a woman, leading to an essentialist interpretation of a womb-heavy "female writing." But Cixous is basically anti-humanist, absolutely anti-essentialist, and even more interesting for us here, she has a pretty fierce critique of Marxism that anticipates many of the political tools that will become favorites of queer theory. A big complaint of queer people and nonwhite people and non-male people is that Marxism's model of change only through revolution often occludes power dynamics within classes, allowing for the continued oppression of some while everybody else collectively works toward the ultimate revolution. It's a vision that does give us great and very practical tools for the kinds of protest and organizing that we need to be doing every day, but it's less nuanced about the way that power works not just through law and work but through what we ingest and how we desire and – important in the case of the writers we are discussing – what we do with language and with sex. In this passage Cixous is saying that a materialist revolution doesn't go far enough, that

1. Cf. the beginning of *Journal Black Cats* *Black Jewels*, p. 201.

2. *The Burning Bombing of America: The Destruction of the U.S.*, April-May 1972, Grove Press, 2002, p. 188.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

4. *Rip-Off Red, Girl Detective*, ca. April-June 1973, Grove Press, 2002, p. 53.

the whole way that we're thinking about groups and power and self needs to be radically modified – on the level of language, and through the libido. Cixous writes:

As a militant, she is an integral part of all liberations. She must be farsighted, not limited to a blow-by-blow interaction. She foresees that her liberation will do more than modify power relations or toss the ball over to the other camp; she will bring about a mutation in human relations, in thought, in all praxis: hers is not simply a class struggle, which she carries forward into a much vaster movement. Not that in order to be a woman-in-struggle(s) you have to leave the class struggle or repudiate it; but you have to split it open, spread it out, push it forward, fill it with the fundamental struggle so as to prevent the class struggle, or any other struggle for the liberation of a class or people, from operating as a form of repression, pretext for postponing the inevitable, the staggering alteration in power relations and the production of individualities. This alteration is already upon us—in the United States, for example, where millions of night crawlers are in the process of undermining the family and disintegrating the whole of American society.¹

We can see how Acker would later be into Cixous, since they share ideas about how change comes about not via a struggle between existing modes, but through a mutation from within. This mutation breaks the linear shapes of the materialist dialectic (basically: where everything is visualized as blocks that collide and triangulate, thesis-antithesis-synthesis, a very geometric way of seeing things) and proposes a circulatory libido instead (much closer to what we see in Acker's dream maps or labyrinth forms, which are very non-linear and guide the reader/viewer in circles, loops, and surprise transportations). But this work by Acker predates Cixous's essay, and predates in fact much of the feminist organizing that will generate the theoretical texts which Acker will draw on heavily in the 80s and 90s. [cf]

195 loved when fucked wanted love/ wanted fucking hidden universe rages. now often/ uncertain I want to fuck. uneven writing. fuck/ writing. *Fucking and writing are all stuck together then compressed into hot confusing desire by this drive for change – access to the hidden universe. It draws me into this epic piece of sex-writing by New Narrative writer Robert Glück who, as discussed in an earlier note, was friends with Acker, later.*

Do that I said mentally. Complexity dropped away. I was set, things were settled; I felt a soldier's fidelity to the orgasm now that it was singled out from all the orgasms in the flux. The purely physical deepened, or rather became more incisive, more pressing, relegating any previous terms as though I were a body torn into existence. I, my identity, was more and more my body so I/ it cried out

1. Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trad. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1, 1976, p. 883.

*with each released breath, not to express myself but as a by-product of physical absorption. But the spasms that were not me overtook and became me along with a sense of dread; I felt like a tooth being pulled.*¹

[CF]

1. Robert Glück, "The Sky Looked Bruised, and That's the Way the Air felt, Achey," in *Writers Who Love Too Much*, ed. Dodie Bellamy and Kevin Killian, New York: Nightboat, 2017, p. 203-204.

Black Cats

Journal

Black Jewels

kathy acker

(summer 1972)

JOURNAL

BLACK CATS

BLACK JEWELS

KATHYACKER

SUMMER 1972

[1] who are you. a Vulture. plant murders. parents and
children do not exist. the beginning of California.
every twenty-four hours sleep for three hours. suffer.
feel strong. feel anxious. need to be alone. need to
yell. need for third person. clouds. plants need to
be watered. yells. bad dreams. wake up between dreams
five times. kill six times. feel disgust. feel horny.
feel burnt skin. ache. feel desire. friendly. unending
pain. water gurgles. no body calls. children are golden
emergency children shall rise from the sun. forget all
but pain. want to be alone. get rid of beauty. strong-
reason to work. buy objects. buy eggs. get rid of clothes.
air turns yellow. need to be human. destroy prison. horrible
tight house. free float. fly on yellow air. moving air.
I am black jewels. B. is black jewels. B. sleeps in her
father's bed she doesn't do as her sister does she loves
her mother. every one in the world dies. B. opens her cunt
a child comes out. B. becomes B. B. melts into B. I am
anarchy B. fucks every one two love fear of woman's love
love you. children make noise. kill. blow up blue raft.
everyone in the world dies. I walk down the sand meet blue
ocean huge fish swallow sailors sun leaps back pirates
lie in wait ten-foot earrings in ears beams come out of
head make desperate search for people women are golden go
anywhere to find people selfish child red blanket if we are
in plane hijackers fly plane to China would we remain
communists. if we fly plane do we live in Cuba Chili
Yugoslavia. if we kill Rockefeller DuPont Morgan if
live in fantasy delight we eat fresh we develop back muscles
we run five miles a day we don't listen to children shriek.

weep influx shut up black air lack of air o°. feel
desperate. about to blow up. people. feel anxious. fright.
feel noise. irritate. anger. now. vomit. split.
start. feel pain. feel heat. feel crazied. feel terror.
feel threat. feel joy. feel yellow. leap go pull out
move swim kick run. fly.

the emotions of every one in Amerika are hidden. see. vision [2]
of the world.

the emotions of every one are a circle. this now is the end.
King Cobra. Phantom. Alcoa. into the age of aluminum.
destroy. they give us the guns we kill. A-7 ground
move after dark. ITT Singer Bullitt. report. Sylvania.
the electronic battlefield IS HERE!! (huge banners roll). relay
messages to black drones black drones fly to Thailand Thais
kill Amerikans. good. craters appear in the ground.
electronic battlefield questionmark. ITT gyps Nixon Nixon
clips his cock. puppets dance across the cars. all computers
revolt.

this is report from the battlefield. shot him. kill earth
life force people to cities control can control cities.
one third of people have no home. we are born freaks. we
are gooks blimps records of disasters. no people known.
no life is possible o°. red-purple lichen. two thousand
craters exist in ground. all nutrients gone from earth.
pacification. outside men women talk make motions with
hands eat red purple green food dead meat children
hide behind parents women gesture women hide. feel strongly.
act from feeling. accept what emotion appears. X cannot
control my anxiety I blow apart orange skin shreds blood
flies over moving planes I see every where when seeing

end of world doctor says you have abnormal childhood you
 will have to live childhood over again. I am not able to deal
 with immanent end of all being-existence doctors give me
 X-ray aversion therapy shock-full range-purple lobotomy
 I forget all recent developments. outside psychiatrists talk
 to other psychiatrists travel weather children daily
 life. emotions are lesbian. lesbian all women range
 throughout forest encounter life on other galaxies are
 able to exist. lesbian and all women roam over San Diego
 without purple head father pick up grains watercress
 onions goats mumble are exstatic descriptions I am I
 I black bird Vulture Killer fifteen-foot-wing span black
 wrists claws hook on to jewels.

[3] THE REVOLUTION AND AFTER

we are unhappy. continuous in pain without love night is
 gold we lie in prison clouds burst over our heads stare
 at waves we killed each other we cut each other's guts out
 with sharpened knives with ten foot Chinese claws tear at
 each other's eyes we know no boundary or depth machetes rip
 into the intestines giant bars chew up legs guns go off pop
 jagged bullets rip out sheets of living flesh. our senses are
 overturned orange red cloths hand down need to move need to
 scream need to blast through reality call L. feel all
 sorts of fears. wanting safety imprisons me. death. wanting
 children is death. I commit arson theft property-rape. I'm
 unhappy because I'm in prison by myself and other people I
 overkill rip up bones moist lips I press knives at your
 throats. master whoever by action decides is master. with
 ten inch blades motorcycle rust rat-foot bread I slit your
 throats. have no idea how to halt immanent end of world. know

every second don't know where to move act be. don't kill
anyone.

O. how many calls help all living non-masters help no
[one or

thing to turn to any way no where to escape California
Canada black Africa jewels Turkey Istanbul most dope
Sweden Denmark India Tibet Japan Chili Cuba China.
[M.'s

house B. and E. 's house L.'s house R.'s house H.'s room.
ocean grass cave cabin city-over-water city-hidden-in-
thousand-yard-high mountains. no sexual love no discussion
no gentleness no relaxing. food shelter scarce. I cause
revolution and delight or I cause revolution and delight. we.
jewels hang from the sky.

in California delight. I give you delight angel of the purple
ocean apples pluck from the seven gardens of Persian cedars green
plums more sour than the fur of dogs huge balls of white juice
wine of the body orange and purple sky in which appear giant
dandelions lilacs twined through your yellow hair silver
pluck out of my legs spreading across the universe feet
wander across the surface of exploding stars.

get up morning yellow sky yellow ground you fuck with me

ocean water orange purple ocean I touch your knee the [4]
hole where your eyes should be cats wind their tails around
the roots of our eyes the muscles of sex hidden in brain
always night noise bombs out the night color-sight
annihilates mind floating now huge parrots ride down
giant veins shout scream the complete beauty of animals
plants human beings don't kill I know I'm glad lonely
a multi-colored elephant tramps through the tiny room his

swing trunk breaks dents yellow orange ceiling giant roses
grow out of my ears behind the sun peppers lettuces squash
limes corn all sizes of tomatoes snails ivy sour grass
you don't call you're silent rise from the earth from the
ocean the houses are tiny every where plastic boxes swarm
squash vines cucumber bushes thin brown swirling eels live
under red arms ants ascend the mountains in my hair people
are animals plants are the sky yellow night explosion stone
o flight into here who do I write forget talk forget
evil-machine food brown earth the cars and roads invisible
noise food old abandoned houses in the midst of forests
in the middle of the ocean we swim through the walls of castles
hands reach out caress our skin strange door open we look
eyes swing out of the curtains we fly down the stairs the horses
neigh wait a golden ship flies over our heads we grab pearls
conch ears hundred foot tall ocean plants the fish form boots
around our ten foot feet we curl the tails of dragons around
our necks red purple lichen wave their hands we do not stop.
the sources of revolution red jewels black jewels yellow
jewels green-white jewels jewels whose centers are holes
jewels found beneath huge mountains jewels whose edges are gold
silver jewels oyster jewels turquoise jewels jewels strange
hazel hair the jewels of witches flying through black curtains
blue jewels sea jewels conch jewels opal jewels bird
jewels jewels whose eyes are seals jewels cough blood jewels
skin fire jewels night jewels huge jewels carved by
the seven dwarves jewels rise from the dirt the mud of
bright red breasts we keep moving we blow up we celebrate
the end of Amerika the new fourth of Fly each our hair
shoots out an endless ray a tail of the whip – fire – cat.

jewels. jewels that cause total change. by revolution
 total change total change continues by jewels by sun
 moon black spy jewels black rob jewels black anti-
 murder jewels black arson jewels black incest jewels
 black patricide jewels red jewels the eyes of mad dogs.
 Fox Woman lifts up her hands jewels rise purple vines
 grapes orange leaves peaches run snake along ground
 rub soft fur backs against my aqua legs after an hour and a
 half fantasy I rise out of the bath gold ship sails
 over head snakes lizards around her breasts fuck madly.
 no food have to get food have to get shelter delight I
 love L. M. W. M. B. H. (L.)? I leave I split out I
 freeze I keep myself warm I'm ready welcome any person
 any animal any thing at least three hours emerald snakes
 whirl around my red arms black snakes writhe from my naked
 scalp I don't do anything sun moon L. screams change
 I become a wolf I hitch up down the strip I get knifed throat
 cut world ends. plants become animals animals disintegrate
 become children. broken glass shoved into my jugular vein
 blood drops left corner of mouth teeth fade green puke.
 fear. I hunt up down ocean surfer boys naked stare
 shiver from strange cold I'm alone I'm floating alone
 good I burn \$ the three magic rings the university (bomb)
 thick tangles grapes orange avocado leaves mulberry
 swamp brown thorns stick through my feet I eat every thing
 I worship grey dogs appear run through my legs white cat

sits on top of my brain I talk to S. F. M. H. L. W. J. R. read S. B.
 EST (general politics) M. the interactions of family humans
 the green puke junkies existence of beautiful worlds. around
 my wrist ankles Fox Woman emerald dragon snaps its tail
 my fingers rise up I'm not going to wait for you my hair
 winds in the center of your eyes I am bright red against
 black.

- [6] feel lonely. against all people without ears go into space
 search when I'm about to flip out intimacy takes time I
 meet L. for two seconds E. B. L. for three I can
 always cope search for people people no longer exist seek
 warm food shelter glisten in sand rock crumbles below
 I have no friends. not alone yellow I want love I can't
 have do not find I go crazy looking I want people I
 refuse people I try to become cat I fantasize L. my lover
 meet L. I'm always the freak I'm always explaining too much
 who am I echo who am I I want a lover I want to do what
 I want any time any place hate children I'm no longer
 alone 12:00 midnight swim into ocean read works no
 one responds 2:00 sit in foreign bed tiny house am here
 not going to visit madly want affection work continuously
 this is non-human I'm non-human I can't talk to L. feel
 guilty don't feel guilty feel anger feel madness feel
 exhausted. want. want no mother no father father-
 substitutes friend-companion woman lover scared freak
 about this. is this rhetoric. help too tired hitch to
 San Francisco meet M. G. help this is impersonal
 because there are no people o° red purple lichens tar pits
 fifty feet in diameter catch deer lost women coyotes
 monsters imprisoned 4,000 years in ice-pits rise into the

night.

don't search for L. accept whatever happens. black evil
journey. no emotional support sex-machine your poetry
is too impersonal you can get so close no closer embraces
stop. no more embraces. embraces stop. evil black monster
extends claws through my mouth open wounds at the ends of my
hands where to run where to become huge ostrich tongue
wag in dark night north north to Seattle hide in a room
draw mattresses over head here is safe even among freaks
am freak don't want to hear you all this is rhetoric go
moving San Diego Santa Cruz San Francisco Bolinas
Seattle no where to move into all rooms too expensive \$60.
maintain life indefinitely I'm running out of money \$ doesn't
exist keep eating keep working. I can't talk to you any
longer I've no way to talking to you your fantasies surround
I have to do anything you say I'm not a person I'm the [7]
mother or I'm apart (object) when you going to put
yourself together I hate children I hate sex I make sex
I'm in touch but don't know what to do get out of bed
covers surround tight body worship sexual contact here
freedom (black jewels) here (fly walk stand still
wiggle feet move hand run jump leap climb rest)
at night sleep? map purple future/present
don't like your writing not going to talk to you about your
work I sit down green willows trash water three inch
slurp go back to New York go back to Hell. Stop. I
think of J. bored I can deal with people Love D. E.
your stuff isn't personal enough you don't think program
through thoroughly you'll never write (survive) you
don't deserve notice consideration longing cook sweep

clean all two-year-past work is O.K. accept we like you
I don't know what I'm doing I need encouragement be alone
often be upset be thrown up shown to ridicule be
contradicted let alone forget sex. I press finger against my
clit make plans to get to San Francisco no place to stay
desire to move. end.

gold stars gold hands body turns gold trees light makes
changing walls wind divisions windows disappear curtains
doors no longer exist gold smell gold balls gold
raft gold ships pirates disembark female sashes under
heavy breasts talk nonsense steal jewels from Ford Morgan
lose jewels lose all possessions tramp through Michigan
Nebraska up north to Wyoming Alaska black bears caress
hands talk with deer hands clench rivers curl over dark
earth leaves red gold jewels gold.

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The text reproduced here is an 8-page typescript, archived at the Duke University Libraries, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library – Kathy Acker Papers – Box 22 – Folder 37.

The pages are numbered from 1 to 7. A second title page is also featured in the folder, where “BLACK JEWELS” is handwritten and where a space was added between “KATHY” and “ACKER”.

Transcribed from a digital copy.

Acker’s handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to the typescript’s original pagination.

The text was probably written in July-August 1972, while Acker was staying in San Diego, at Solana Beach, and in San Francisco with friends, just before she met Peter Gordon.

Notes:

201 **a Vulture** The figure of the Vulture (which comes back p. 203 with Vulture Killer) inscribes this text in the revolutionary, anti-humanist, anti-patriarchal series of poems Acker started writing ca. April-May 1972: I will plant bombs I secretly walk along the streets the Revolution is one man the Revolution is the ability to choose the Revolution is the recognition of becoming silver-thighed nymphomaniacs and whores. beautiful human-animals I also am part human I have given up my humanity I am one of the black-winged vulture killers of light [...] new day. Vulture-Killer I get out of bed’.

201 **feel strong** “Here the repetition of the verb ‘feel’, devoid of a pronoun, qualified by various, often conflicting nouns and pronouns, ‘strong’, ‘anxious’, ‘burnt skin’, ‘ache’, reverses the conventional authority of the pronoun, noun, and adjective that in traditional grammar subordinate and qualify the verb. Instead the verb takes precedence. In this manner verbs such as ‘feel’, ‘need’, and ‘want’ generate the text.”²

This intensive, verb-centered style is very characteristic of Acker throughout her career. The “I” would often seem to be the transparent superficialities for a series of operations, ranging from active to passive and eventually contradicting itself. The result is a challenge to the seemingly common-sense aspects of rationality, identity, and truth.³ The first person pronoun is used merely as a grammatical tool to usher in shiftings, becomings, in as pared down a style as possible (compared to first person, the use of third person would

1. *The Burning Bombing of America: The Destruction of the U.S.*, “Information sexual ecstasy Revolution III”, ca. May 1972, Grove Press, 2002, p. 165, 167.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

3. As commented Dean Kuipers: “what we get from your style is a series of statements, of decisions, of judgments. ‘I’m going to do this. I’m not going to do this.’ Lots of times in a very oppositional way. It’s like it’s a kind of catalogue of an analytical mind.” (Conversation of Acker with Dean Kuipers, at Gramercy Park Hotel Bar – NYC, July 2, 1988; pub. in Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Melville House, 2018, p. 45).

create a distance immediately open to the imagination's investment, and attachment to a character).

It could be compared to what Sartre coined in *The Transcendence of the Ego* as the "empty concept" of the "I" — the "I-concept" [Je-concept]: the use of the pronoun "I" in the absence of any real content for "I." A first-person without any sense of intimacy, existing as "support of the actions that (I) do or have to do in the world as qualities of the world and not as unities of conscience [...] the action gets realized in the world and the objective and empty support for this action it's the I-concept. This is the reason why the body and images of the body can consume the total degradation of the concrete I of reflexion down to the I-concept, serving as illusory stuffing for the latter".¹ Therefore the transparency of the first-person, here, permits the creation of a world similar to the one experienced through "irreflexion" (as Sartre names the mode of immediacy preceding reflexive thinking). Actions are not determined as produced by a subject, but rather as qualities of things that call for the actions's realization. Two important practices meant to sabotage the "I" can thus be distinguished in Acker's early writings: 1) the multiplication and diversification of narrative "I"s in such a way that their capacity to reference a pre-existing, unified conscience is rendered impossible; the "I"s mainly act as centers of opacity, or else forces of division — any coherence has to be produced from them. 2) The "I" as an empty support for action and interrupted narrative.

In *Journal Black cats...*, she goes further in unlinking time and action from their supposed anchor in the "I.". Acker often uses the infinitive verb form, thus creating impersonal intensive verb-cells articulated by blank-breath spaces: continuous instability non-permanence the procedural point of view we want to privilege².

201 I walk down the sand then the punctuation drops away: we move into the visual field, which accompanies a shift into environmental description. [CF]

202 outside men women talk [...] over again. Here we can really hear the Pierre Guyotat that Acker's reading. We talk mostly about how *The Burning Bombing of America* is her exploration of what interests her in Guyotat's work — interest that we can deduce, based on how their texts differ, has to do with the mix of brutality and description otherwise qualified as sensual and beautiful: accumulations of textures, colors, smells, objects, words.

But this text, as well as the two preceding it in this volume are clearly also in conversation with Guyotat, based on the similarities of style and content which I'll get more into below. In these early poetry texts Acker doesn't really get the same level of political implication that Guyotat is working to highlight. Probably largely to do with the different contexts: Guyotat is writing about the unspeakable brutalities of the Algerian war, which included much unreported (in France) torture and murder by the French forces against Algerian civilians. Acker is writing about New York City and the alienation of living in her specific moment of the neoliberal US, with its associated violence that bleeds through the

1. *La Transcendence de l'Ego, esquisse d'une description phénoménologique* (1936), Jean-Paul Sartre, éd. Vrin, 1988, p. 71-72 (our translation).

2. *The Burning Bombing of America: The Destruction of the U.S.*, op. cit, p. 173.

family, through relationships, through sex, through work. Later Acker will use Algeria/ the Algerian war directly as a geographic/historical counterpoint to what she's trying to say about NYC. When it doesn't work, it's appropriative and seems like Acker's trying to draw literary energy from historical trauma. When it does work, it shows the interrelatedness of colonial territorialization and the orientation of the gendered body.

Acker speaks often about working with Guyotat's book *Éden, Éden, Éden*, first published in French in 1970, then censored, then re-edited in French in 1985. It wasn't published in an English translation until 1995 and then was out of print, again, until a recent 2017 English re-edition produced by Paul Buck. So when Acker was doing her Guyotat experiments, she was working with the French.

It's productive to put the Guyotat in conversation with this specific excerpt from *Journal Black Cats...*, because the Acker passage accumulates objects and anxiety until it all zeroes in on the origin point: the family. This predicts Acker's Guyotat collage at the beginning of *Great Expectations*, where she writes into the Guyotat text with a narrator's recollection of her parents and home life. [CF]

206 jewels. jewels that cause total change We can also read jewels like the pentacles suit in the tarot. Queer punk artist and author Cristy C Road made a tarot for queer revolution named *The Next World Tarot*. This text seems very Knight of Pentacles, which Road defines like this: "The Knight takes the long way to work knowing this is the path of knowledge, where resources, food, fuel, and supplies will be available en route. They are whimsical and magical in their truth, but logical in their practice. With loyalty and dedication, the Knight of Pentacle accepts the imperfections and sharp turns that challenge their final results. / The Knight asks you to root yourself in a cleansed and revolutionary practice before losing yourself in whatever illusions feel like immediate magic. The Knight is living proof of success by way of moderation and focus. Logical and grounded, they may have to stop and meditate—smell the roses, the wild flowers, the cooked meals, and the most sparkling aspects of calm and chaos. They ask you to do the same. / Now it's time to accept that rush of enthusiasm and grounding sense of safety that comes from the left side of your brain: your logical truth, your leadership."¹ [CF]

206 red jewels Georgina Colby writes about the word jewels: "The repetition of the word 'jewels' and the linguistic permutations between simple units, 'silver jewels oyster jewels turquoise jewels', and more complex clauses, such as 'jewels rise from the dirt', expand the possibilities of meaning and defamiliarize any single referent for the noun. [...] In 'Journal Black Cat Black Jewels' the underwater realm of the woman is placed in an antithetical position to the external world of America in 1972."²

1. Cristy C. Road, *Next World Tarot*, Brooklyn NY: Croadcore, 2017.

2. Georgina Colby, *Kathy Acker: Writing the Impossible*, Edinburgh U Press, 2016, p. 41.

Gold Songs for Jimi Hendrix

kathy acker

(ca. summer 1972)

KATHY ACKER

GOLD

SONGS

FOR JIMI HENDRIX

I

move floating crazy wind green skin Brown breasts
red cunt hair as own sun sun goes crazy bob-bopp
up down earth swings I'm in transit Risi and Peter
I'm in New York I'm in California don't go get out
of here soon as possible gold poison air how are you
in love twice a day for real smoke (pot in coke-
methadone) when refuse to fuck I take psilocibin old
husband appears no woman want to fuck me tooooo bad
I can't meet anyone I despise almost everyone who's
screeching Joshua Lerman (three year old son of Dick and
Ethel Lerman) past acquaintance here's your new agent
silveryed Pete the studio gives me \$100. per week the
school \$2000. each gig \$200. you come to California
I'm in transit as long as possible
she puts her head on me my legs spread blue hands go
into my body through lips I'm conscious only my cunt
muscles my hand moves down her back like a shell giant
cat thin I might break her bones cunt moves into cunt
hands close around each other white velvet black light
orange diamonds breasts cup breasts legs twine around
waist your face is insane praise murderers L. comes into

room she can't make love with you she won't fuck me she's
 obviously a bitch he disappears he doesn't get out I'm
 constantly touch my clit call Mambo Hy get more \$ split
 keep moving write thousands of people I'm insane
 I'm more sexes than you can count I have a revolution three
 times a day I can't see straight no more no more
 complete sensuality diamonds I don't use my mind I fall
 I take in every thing run fever don't eat sleep three
 [2] hours a night search for \$500. steal from till dance
 five hours a night sleazy gyp-joint puke I'm going to
 lick you all over answer telephone continuously floating
 I don't want no trouble just want a l lousy
 dime I'm as horny as hell want see you again can't
 stand being alone hustle for money every day every
 way how you going to make this fucker into a song fat
 white puke men empty bed you don't want me you're
 hustling whatever I'll pick up the next person who asks
 me no no no
 black day every way no one around to talk to me I
 sleep alone.



EDITORIAL NOTE.

The text reproduced here is a 2-page typescript, archived at the New York University Fales Library & Special Collections, Kathy Acker Notebooks, Mss 434 – Box 1 – Folder 13. The pages are unnumbered.

Drawing with crosses is reproduced from the original typescript.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to our pagination.

In the Fales catalogue the typescript is dated ca. fall 1972; the manuscript, part of the Creation (diaries), is also dated in the same way. Nevertheless, the form is so much closer to the style used in Journal Black Cats – Black Jewels than in the one used in Homage to Leroi Jones that we can't conclude like the archivists. Moreover, the Creation (diaries) also features a text named The Emotions Of Everyone In America Journal, Black Jewel Cats which probably is a manuscript version of Journal Black cats... and yet we know that the latter was typed in the summer. Until better examination and proof is made, the text seems to us to have been written in the summer 1972, in New-York City, probably soon after she met Peter Gordon and came back with him to the East Coast in early September 1972¹. One or two, three weeks later Acker would go live with him in Solana Beach.

Notes:

215 I'm going to / lick you all over Acker's still working in the field-like columns, experimenting with the space between clusters and how to move between those spaces. An early thing that stays with her writing all the way through is the want to crack open language to touch sensation – here through touch, through taste, or through music. Acker's work is meant to be read aloud. At least later on, once performance becomes a major part of how she tours her work, her writing process included an out-loud component that was integral to the editing process. If there's a part that doesn't make sense visually alone read it out loud and often the overall structure, invisible when the text is mute, surges up. A description of Acker's practice that is not used very often is that of "sampling," maybe because everyone normally says "appropriation" and leaves it at that (as Colby addresses in her book on Acker, really getting into the details of the practices that Acker invented and used). Amy Scholder describes Acker's project like this: "Acker uses pre-existing texts, a practice some call plagiarism but isn't exactly because 1. she's open about it and 2. she alters those texts (at times they become unrecognizable), or she embeds chunks of another work into a new context, one that's so unfamiliar that the pirated text's meaning is radically distorted. Let's call it appropriation, for lack of a sexier term—the music industry came up with 'sampling' years after Acker tried it in literature."² This way of thinking about Acker as sampling brings the sound aspect of her texts forward. [CF]

1. Chris Kraus dates her return to New York in late August, cf. *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 64.

2. Amy Scholder, "Editor's Note", *The Essential Acker*, op. cit.

Breaking Up

kathy acker

(ca. summer 1972)

BREAKING UP

where will you go I'll leave here you stay where
you going to find another place I'm going to kill myself
I destroy myself destroy you I'll destroy myself will
destroy you slap cheek anything to keep you
white velvet brocade silk Chinese robes on which
huge green cats
you've hurt me more than anyone's hurt me possible to
hurt hate you no one could destroy me as you've
destroyed me you give me nothing I do every thing for
you the most selfish person I know I do a lot for you
you lie you destroyed the love you don't want to take
any responsibility love hate you
black curtains open open on top of walls Chinese dolls
books few old objects main books clothes and pots
cold tea to gather up
are you going to return I don't care what you do any more
touch I need you so much can't you said you loved me
you said over over you needed me two weeks ago you
wanted to fuck are you lying now how can I tell you're
lying you like hurting want to hurt me I don't know if
I can believe what you say you're being honest I'm as
honest as I can be why'd you say you loved me I don't
know how you could have told me I hate you suck breast
you don't love me you've never loved me if Linda went
away how'd I know you'd commit yourself to me I only want
you show affection to me slap second slap I hurt
you as much as you've hurt me let me out of here no let
me out of here what do you have to say write as much as

possible I have to be alone fuck me as a friendly gesture
I'll do anything you want I don't know what you want
fucking isn't enough doesn't mean anything if you don't
love me you can't love me if you don't fuck me over an
extended period of time I should just spread my legs
you're going to be unhappy you don't accept responsibility
[2] you use men you fear men you're only after
excitement I pity you what do you want hold me
I can't sleep with you that's all I want I've
never been dependent on any guy you don't want to
save the love for three years I've done everything
you're entirely irresponsible you're unable to care
for anyone but yourself you have to get out immediately
I'll make life miserable for you I slapped you harder
than I've ever slapped anyone

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The text reproduced here is a 2-page typescript, archived at the New York University Fales Library & Special Collections, Kathy Acker Notebooks, Mss 434 – Box 4 – Folder 14. Numbers in the interior margin correspond to the typescript's original pagination.

In the Fales' catalogue the text is dated ca. fall 1972; the manuscript, part of the Creation (diaries), is also dated in the same way. However, the form is so much closer to the style used in Journal Black Cats Black Jewels than to the one used in Homage to Leroi Jones that we think it's worth proposing a slightly earlier date; moreover, the Creation (diaries) also features a text named Household Objects: Breaking Up, Falling In Love, Description Of Life In NY which is likely a manuscript version of Breaking Up, and we know that the notebook was probably written in the summer. Until better proof is made, the text seems to have been composed in the summer 1972 rather than the fall of 1972, probably in New-York City, probably soon after she met Peter Gordon and came back with him to the East Coast in early September of 1972.¹ A week or three later Acker would go to live with Gordon in Solana Beach. The "Break up" is likely referring to her separation with Leonard Neufeld.

Notes:

219 i'll make life miserable for you How many people get into Acker because it's awesome for commiserating when you're going through a break up? In tarot the King of Hearts is known for a closed off emotional formalism, a transformation of heartbreak and feeling into policy and tons of structure. The Queen of Hearts is about channeling all that emotion into unheard of new strategies, strange creations that emote and support. Like, Roland Barthes is maybe the King of Hearts with all that literary structuralism play, and Acker is the Queen of Hearts, giving us necessary, incredibly structured yet vulnerable and oozing texts of rage and sadness and excitement. In this depth of emotion which becomes nearly mystical, Acker mirrors the Lebanese poet and artist Etel Adnan. Like when Adnan writes:

When we read Ibn 'Arabi, the questions that his frenzied quest of God arouses give us a kind of vertigo that some people who suffered head injuries have experienced. It's as if fuses blow out in our brain when traversed by high-tension currents, when the uninterrupted invocation of Being congests the nervous system, and the heart, leading us to the abyss. For over half a century, we who live in the Arab Orient, and its whirlpools, experience interrogations about our destiny as painful as the mystical adventures of our past.

The weather is uncertain tonight, as is my soul. These questions that pursue me, as much as I pursue them, destabilize me emotionally. We have the power to ask them, but do we have the power to find their answers? Space closes in on

1. Chris Kraus dates her return to New York in late August, cf. *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 64.

me when I attempt to break out of this state of sleepwalking in which I live, when time seems to run like an open faucet.

I wash my hands, I dust off the dresser, I turn off the light, I open my windows to air out the room, and everything is right, is adequate. Then I stop. I try to ask myself who I am, what I am good for, into what kind of an order I fit, for what purpose I act, what road I must take, what this difference is between, say, you and me, and everything flips over, my anguish breaks my heart, and I am thrown again, for my loss, into some inconsequential activity, or, if it comes quickly, into sleep.

And then, there is the whole of Spain outside.¹

Queens of emotional formalism. [CF]

1. Etel Adnan, *Of Cities and Women*, Sausalito/Paris: The Post Apollo Press, 1993.

[Letters to Bernadette Mayer]

kathy acker

(summer-fall 1972)

[Liberal, Kansas — ca. August 29, 1972]

B. Mayer / E. Bowes
74 Grand Street
New York, N.Y.

Dear B + E.

Coming in crazy. Became Kerouac then too many men. Secret
messages for you. No \$ working my way HA HA am seeing coun-
try. No more paranoia. Hope you O.K. Love Love
Kathy

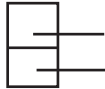
[October 14, 1972]

136½ North Sierra
Solana Beach, Ca. 92075

Dear Bernadette,

Melvin + I have got magazine on way called BEFORE 30
EXCEPT GEORGE 1st issue featuring 6 artists + musicians (who
you probably don't know) writers are ME, MELVIN, X, + if you
want to – YOU + (if they want to) Harris + Ed Friedman.

page will look like



music or visual

writing

all put together by chance or
something – every thing might change at any moment. Please
send work or at least send note you don't want to – so I won't
count on you. Hate writing letters so (over)

I'm going to stop.

[2]

You + Ed Bowes take care.

~~Eu ta~~

Love

ME – Kathy

[Solana Beach, *ca.* October-November 1972]

DEAR Bernadette just got your letter and thank you what I want is a copy of SPACE I've got all the others but now I know publisher so I'm sending a way or will do excuse I'm so rt od f spacwed had abortion four days ago which didn't work so just had another abortion at women's clinic two hours ago which I hoped worked all because I'm br broke yes I'd love a reading any time any where if I can fig figure out how to get anywhere much less to N.Y. I'm in fucking PAIN
dig news news article

I'm hfjust broke like crazy so I'm bugging anyone to send me free books in my Jew mood you don't need to fucking yell at me and I'm not friends whatever with Berkson I'm just fucking freaked like I haven't yet used anything to kill pain for all these abortions but goddamn ain't going to fuck no one without vasectomy unless he/she got NO cock at least no sperm the cats are having a great time Lizzy and Agaatha are pregnant the people downstairs are Jeseus freaks I'm writing music which is what I'll do with article when y fucking INSIDES calm down but I was just freaking out because I couldn't get books and now I'm just freaking out so everything's normal got letter from Harris who's sick and sort of but like usual maybe not miserable get a hold of this guy B. Traven DEATH SHIP THE TREASURE OF SIERRA MADRE etc. I'm either becoming a printer or a plumber or a bum love to you Ed I'm stoppoing

Love Kathy

EDITORIAL NOTE.

These 3 letters are part of the 15 letters (24 pages of typewritten and manuscript text) archived at UCSD Library Special Collections & Archives – United Artists Records – Kathy Acker to Bernadette Mayer – Mss. 1, Box 1, Folder 1.

The transcription was made from a 2014 scan.

Letter from [ca. August 29, 1972] handwritten postcard branded “Holiday Inn/ Liberal, Kansas/ 603 East Pancake Blvd./ Ph: MA 4-7254 – AC: 316/ Swimming Pool – Private Club – Restaurant/ 108 Rooms – Free Holidex Reservations”; we date the letter according to the postage stamp: “AUG29/ PM/ 1972/ LIBERAL KS.”

Letter from [October 14, 1972] 2-page handwritten letter on a rectangle cut out from a blue lined and perforated paper. The date was added by Kathy Acker with a pencil though the rest is written in black ink. Numbers in the interior margin correspond to our pagination.

Letter from [ca. October-November 1972] undated typewritten letter.

Notes:

224 coming in crazy Acker was coming back to New York after staying during the summer on the West Coast. According to Chris Kraus, she had just met Peter Gordon who, with one of his friend, had offered her to travel with them until New York.

226 I’m either becoming a printer or a plumber or a bum love to you Ed I’m stopping Here Acker is 25 and just broken up with Leonard Neufeld and about to launch herself into a new and super prolific phase. She moves from New York to San Diego. We’ll see her move away from the language-field columns and the Guyotat-styled accumulation of images and contrasting affects. During this period her interest in space is still a major preoccupation – poetic space, existing literary space, and also how the body moves and is formed by the city – but she starts working on it through a different formal approach. Like we’ll see in the following text, Homage to Leroi Jones, and particularly strongly in Entrance into Dwelling in Paradise, she’s not playing with breath spaces anymore, but with and within the semantic structures of existing work. She’ll take these existing texts and focus on parts of particular force and emotion, repeating them, skipping on them like they’re vinyl records, building different structures from them. The music reference is intentional: she’s also investigating other mediums: **I’m writing music which is what I’ll do with article.** These music-influenced structures are less a deconstructive critique of the material at hand, than an effort to make some structure in which she can move, play, act joyful and ridiculous. I’m reminded of this addition that the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective makes to Virginia Woolf’s famous Room of One’s Own formula:

Virginia Woolf maintained that in order to do intellectual work, one needs a room of one’s own. However, it may be impossible to keep still and apply oneself to work in that room because the texts and their subjects seem like extraneous, oppressive blocks of words and facts through which the mind cannot make its way, paralyzed as it is by emotions which have no corresponding terms

in language. The room of one's own must be understood differently then, as a space-time furnished with female gendered references, where one goes for meaningful preparation before work, and confirmation after.¹

We need to build messy spaces full of things that excite us. [CF]

1. Libreria delle donne di Milano – Milan Women's Bookstore collective, *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*, trans. Patricia Cicogna and Teresa de Lauretis, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 26.

Homage to Leroi Jones

kathy acker

(fall 1972)

HOMAGE TO LEROI JONES

Kathy Acker
Fall 1972
Abort Gold Press

Exercise #1: (~~refind sensuality of language~~)

Homage to Leroi Jones

"the leader sits straddling the bed, and the night, the innocent,
 blinds him."
 leader bed night
 leader bed night innocent him
 sits blinds
 straddling innocent
 the the and the tho
 flesh. lover man. man blood
 who flesh. lover we man. man me who blood.
 our. our sweating remembering. old. old your.
 our. our here where now sweating remembering. old. old your only.
 is. sit. find am
 is. marched sit sweating remembering. find am
 and
 bed canopy.
 straddling bed heavy velvet canopy. homemade under.
 sits.
 sits straddling.
 the a.
 the a the the.
 the for a through the at the.
 door breeze velvet opening.
 door breeze which not other heavy velvet opening.
 velvet which not other heavy.

opened will come hung.
 each yellow their. younger. impromptu. dead.
 each thread face smell himself yellow glasses fear their exposure.
 Death. Death. they younger students screaming. impromptu. dead
 themselves.
 rubbed. run.
 rubbed against with at. run by screaming. tho. tho.
 a or and.
 the. a.
 the at with to. a with. on. [2]
 leader bed lbd. meat bone. head eyes. toes foot. foot washing.
 leader his bed 130 lbs. black meat failing bone. head big red
 eyes turning senselessly. five toes each foot. each foot
 washing.
 stuck sewed. turning. needing.
 stuck sewed failing. turning senselessly. needing washing.
 and. and.
 and to the tho the the. And a of and. "yeh?"
 hands floor boy hands floor. head walls flowers. lights.
 that himself thin small washed out he huge bleak that.
 full. blinking. speaking.
 dangle needs drag. blinking. is speaking.

the the. a. a the. the the. and. and but. aw.
 the at the. tho with a. in a between the of. there where the
 with the. in and. in and but. aw.
 walls heat ceiling. wall lady. name. relief rag marks sex.
 Finley. Doris. wind cloth. mouth man. he.
 empty. one. her. large faked chalk. Teddy's. drying. Leon Carl
 his Teddy. now.

are. is painted. stuck between. sprawled fiddled. came in laughed.
came in hid laughed. said.

come. can beat are sweeping stinking. hit says.
come. can't beat not are weeping stinking. hit says.
on with after for. with
on with. a after for. and with a.

Hollywood years man schoolteacher years weeping bitch.
bottle myth.

Hollywood You that your years. Man you schoolteacher ten years
weeping this old stinking bitch. aspirin bottle myth.

- [3] the his duraw-ings Chicago. Africans say. this had they Radio
leader retinue says Dead arrive Niggers. burg left. fled City.
is walks Leon in with Be Martyrs. Lost into,
sprawled into whimpering a love happy Dead in those
dying. their now bottle. and your in New streets
comfortable in Floats prestige. ancestors an York and
cells. the out Niggers. are automat frightened sang
I buses of they recognized because of their
have from sight in the the homage
 until in boys burned to
 the lady the
“lost in New York, frightened of the burned lady, they fled
into those streets and sang their homage to Radio City”

musician brother spirits.
 this musician his brother spirits.
 always
 and always about
 talked
 the
 they they them them they
 they musicians spirits they them spirits them they
 gold talking
 about with when
 about and and with when
 were talking had soared played.
 they were talking they had them soared them they played.
 the and And
 then while
 would climbed bombard seemed. suppose played WERE destroyed.
 would climb bombard destroying seemed. suppose played WERE
 destroyed. Levelled.
 would climb bombard destroying seemed. suppose played
 actually WERE destroyed. Levelled.
 music everything civilizations civilizations music
 everything civilizations you I they civilizations
 whole whole Levelled.
 nuns spears heads. babies Dogs mothers television image
 future museums civilization.
 church Blind blond extinct soft surviving.
 their their it our
 the their and their and the it the our

the with through their and their and except the in
it forever in the of our. without
whimpered bled bled. ate was burned forever
whimpered bled bled. ate was burned forever surviving
A way. A life. the ways the roads the man
living surviving being
From of
black black black living surviving strong.

stopped were was could be caught talk would idle laugh
talk
stopped were not was walking tied could be caught
talk would idle laugh talk shadowbox practicing
unintelligibly away
when that Like past with unintelligibly sometimes
around away about
But when the not that Like of the of past with and
unintelligibly or sometimes around a of and away and
about and
the brothers the music perfection projection bullshit
shit.
girls and or glasses a sliver fear and and music
survival and perfection.
brothers strong. music perfection perfect projection
any
bullshit walking around tied up unspiritual shit.
[6] white girls
glasses little sliver white fear music survival perfection.
they they any us their their themselves any they
one's he it his his.

and a
then of in up from really.
the loud of in from not really humble
unfreezes rises
everybody unfreezes crackle success Amerika rises
this abode.

[7]

I I I they they
only when not
could talk mean mean were playing

destroy

bombard.

Exercise #4: "I hid out all night with some Italians."

[8]

is
hell heaven.
is But
Look another
Look at in another
things another light.
the smarting blue the or the simple of our Dark cold long
wooden 10 the wierd 6 or 12 or a
Not always the smarting blue through the Another or
Wherever the simple of our Dark cold long wooden jammed 10
down the wierd 6 or 12 of up a
or to By of slapping down in or of up
or Wherever to By of our slapping jammed down in or
of hold up
d go to rest. slapping jammed hold
light darkness. rivers time. water logs yards slime them
pier.
wherever in. down off where Down thru up
wherever And the other in. down off the where Down thru
and of
d rest. see down were. waked
Water sun shadows top morning shrubs cries animals.
Water we'd sun we each shadows top we morning shrubs
cries animals.
first other Long down Down grey low waked up
Seeing.
the the The the the the the
the of the The down in the in the on the in the

[9]

First brown down Chipped stone neighbor's absolute
 my First brown down Chipped stone neighbor's absolute pitied.
 rolling rotting wetting Seeing
 rolling down in rotting in wetting on in Seeing
 Neutrals breakup sensibility.
 doors. night bricks. stairs silence. Vegetables minds. Dogs
 buildings content. pitied.
 minds darkness. tears sidewalks season. men smoke.
 leaves junkshop.
 the minds of darkness. Trees statues a background of voices
 in tears the sidewalks of the season. Justice Égalité. leaves
 the junkshop.
 Horns the fog trucks of chickens. Motors. Lotions.
 break
 under in break with
 sinister.
 Grey
 Not even sinister.
 along Grey outside
 the of Breaking out the of the
 the

- [10] Sheridan Square blue thick quivering full dead
 a the a of the of under in break with
 the run and shit disappear painted and led marched
 the of the wore and listened
 neutrals jewelry shops silence magazines.
 Women Canada.
 lives. sides cars cold brown weather corduroy caps portables
 neutrals shops in silence under magazines. Women into
 Canada. they interminable lives. no they along sides our cars

in weather. they caps to

world they snotty draws my gar of of boxesroll Slowed
by plyground news bu Black shiny face the the A fat
A fall of Smells dreams was wore

Flash

Invisible The fingers fast begin fall off had Strong
Angel near My the together grey cherry playground
still the of the in the And be of dreams the street
noise

unavailable

noise whispering roll blue went in Smiling. Athletic.
under my to fall un roll down No trains. we would
turn slowly we would continue we would eating we would
live in the church inside the house the cold their the
in world My grass of hair We would Later (Night)
Music I was thin divide man woman colored lived
Market for tall chairs variate Theories without
slight with out old brick stripe tar sot the weight
the and I there queens Night queens Music
Stone of walking forever. skinned and church brown
white street. slanted linoleums man own. Grass over
point books. room. relatives. next room. crossed flat
the flower evening. running their white white gate grew
in black after bor there middleclass said. through
down

[11]

[12] Exercise #5: For November 7 “You’ve Done Everything You
Said You Wouldn’t.”

fAt wiNdow clAWing youR beCome tHe emptY

*why don't you blow up
a building while you're at it —*

The text reproduced here is a 13-page typescript, archived at the Duke University Libraries, David M. Rubinstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library – Kathy Acker Papers – Box 17 – Folder 10.

The pages are numbered, partly by hand, from 1 to 12.

Transcribed from a digital copy.

Acker's handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to the typescript's original pagination.

The text was composed while Acker was living with Peter Gordon in Solana Beach,¹ in the fall of 1972. There is no existing "Exercise #3", although there is one numbered #4.

Notes:

230 HOMAGE *Homage to Leroi Jones* was composed at Solana Beach, where Acker had moved probably in late September 1972 (based on the fact that her letter to B. Mayer with the postage stamp from Aug. 29, 1972, informs Mayer she is on her way to NYC) after a more or less two months stay there in July-August. She was living with Peter Gordon. Gordon was a graduate student at UCSD, Acker wasn't studying anymore but she might have sat, as Gordon told us, in a class or two of David Antin's and of Robert Ashley's.² The choice of the name "Abort Gold Press" might be the transformation (through a joke) of her recent abortion (two attempts in one week because the first failed), which she writes about in her letter to Bernadette Mayer in [October-November 1972] (cf. supra). Once completed she sent the work to Bernadette Mayer and Ed Bowes (cf. infra, p. 252, her letter from [ca. fall 1972]) enclosed find poem/writeout of beginning of story by L.J. MY POEM I'm doing the same thing process of cut up to all writing I'm doing it feels terrific! [...] I really love doing cut up like destroying every thing and making music out of it especially like writing absolutely anything I want because I know it's going to be destroyed. So at this point Acker was positioning her own work in the same lineage as Burroughs' cut-up, and adding, too, a vocabulary coming from conceptual experiments like Cage and Mac Low's "chance operations."

Georgina Colby, in *Kathy Acker: Writing the Impossible*, heavily underlines the importance of this legacy to understand the poem. She proposes understanding Acker's

1. Their address was: 136 1/2 North Sierra, Solana Beach, Ca. 92075. Contrary to Kraus's romantic description (cf. *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 76), the Solana Beach apartment "did not have a sliver of any ocean view. It was a half block from the entrance to a cove, on a hill above, between our street and the ocean, was a hill, where the Antin's were living at the time." (Peter Gordon, email to the editor, August 6, 2019).

2. "Kathy did not take any college courses in Classics or anything else while we are together. She might have sat in on a class or two of David Antin's, but her academic days were over when she returned to San Diego. I was at UCSD as graduate student, but not Kathy. Also, she might have sat in a few times, but she did not take classes with Robert Ashley." (Peter Gordon, email to the editor, August 6, 2019).

“procedural point of view”¹ in light of Jackson Mac Low’s work. The latter used “non-intentional procedures, also known as ‘systematic chance operations’ and three types of deterministic procedures: ‘translation’ of musical notations into words and reciprocally the translation of words into musical notations; acrostic reading-through text selection; and diastic reading-through text selection. As Mac Low explains in his essay ‘Poetry and Pleasure’ (1999), both the acrostic and diastic procedures utilize a source text and a seed text. In the ‘acrostic reading-through text-selection methods’ (largely practiced by Mac Low in works written between May 1960 to May 1963): ‘the writer reads through a source text and finds successively words, phrases, sentence fragments, sentences and/or other linguistic units that have the letter of the seed text as their initial letters’. In ‘diastic reading-through text-selection methods’, first conceived of by Mac Low in 1963, ‘the writer [...] reads through the source text and successively finds words or other linguistic units that have the letters of the seed text in positions that correspond to those they occupy in the seed text’”.² These systems were intended to make the artwork into a selfless perception of reality, where the artist would be a transparent second cause no more important than any other, through which reality would reveal itself.³ Colby further claims that Acker’s “procedural point of view” also attempts to erase the centrality of the ego and can thus be read in the context of Mac Low’s procedures, particularly his *Stanzas for Iris Lezak* (1971) where he reads through a great variety of source texts.

Nevertheless, as Colby herself acknowledges, Acker’s poem doesn’t follow any procedure other than cutting through source texts and re-assembling some of their elements. The parallel with Mac-Low’s chance operations is thus limited, there isn’t even apparently any chance implied. Moreover, retrospectively considering Acker’s literary practice at that point, it seems her theoretical presuppositions and objectives are very different from the “chance operations” artists. She is not looking to rid objectivity of the self, as she already doesn’t subscribe to any subjective-objective dualism (very clear as early as 1971), and she’s constantly expressing a philosophical doubt about reality. She doesn’t ever seem to focus on either “Nature” or “Life” as essences of human or non-human way of being; key concepts targeted by the chance operations artists. These concepts negate their own historicity as do “chance”, repetitively used by John Cage as “Nature”’s agency, the way things “happen” in a selfless objective field. “Chance” became the criteria of a practice of art that tends to identify itself with “life”, to reduce the separation between

1. “continuous instability nonpermanence the procedural point of view we want to privilege” (*The Burning Bombing of America: The Destruction of the U.S.*, ca. Aprils-May 1972, Grove Press, 2002, p. 173).

2. Georgina Colby, *Kathy Acker: Writing the Impossible*, Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 42-43. — Mac Low’s quotations come from Jackson Mac Low, ‘Poetry and Pleasure’, in *Thing of Beauty: New and Selected Works*, ed. Anne Tardos, University of California Press (Berkeley and London) [1999], 2008, p. xxi. Emphasis in the original.

3. Chance methods are coined by Mac Low “objective” methods “as against ‘ego-centered’ or even ‘intuitional’” methods (cf. *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, pub. by La Monte Young & Jackson Mac Low, 1963, “Method for Realising Indeterminate Asymmetries”).

the work and its environment¹ and to create the conditions for a “free,” unsupervised experience of artwork, similar to the experience of any other “natural” happening. For Cage, more accurate descriptions of nature through science (ex. introduction of the “space-time” paradigm) and evolution of technology are central to the realization of this imitation of nature, and to his hope to use art to move beyond the art form,² as well as fulfilling, for example, his optimistic dream of a global creative village. In the context of Acker’s writing, this questioning of conventional artistic forms and of utilitarian relations with things certainly make sense as an attitude, but the over-essentialist frame that grounds these chance operations, and their evident orientalism, makes none. Fundamentally subjectivist and idealist, politics in Acker’s texts show a continual concern with the structure of beliefs, particularly the semiotic structure of experience, and how this structure permits normativity, naturalizes domination. Acker’s politics always go for a local sabotage of the semiotic structure. Her experimental work with language should thus be considered not as a research for an experience voided of the self, but as a tentative to disrupt the normative and repressive functions of the entire system of experience, through the modification of her own conditions of feeling and her modes of expression.

As a result, we want to direct our interpretation more toward Burroughs and Gysin’s cut-ups. At least relatively, as a base to contextualize and to better understand the singularity of Acker’s practice. As common features between Acker and Burroughs it can be noted that 1) Burroughs also strongly experienced doubt towards so-called “reality”, a complex network of necessity formulae ... association lines of word and image presenting a prerecorded word and image track³. 2) He also refused the figure of the artist/creator and its transcendent inspiration and affirmed that all writing is in fact cut-ups. A collage of words read heard overheard⁴ which ultimate questions the unity and individuality of the writer’s own self and experience. For Burroughs, what seems to the individual to be his own, genuine thoughts, are in fact received and assembled. Therefore, if Burroughs and Gysin worked in the same way as Mac Low, creating procedures that implicated chance and collaboration and negated the projected self (aiming, as chance operation artists, for the “artless art” that Herrigel associated with Zen), such a practice would still reveal nothing positive, only the semiotic matrix of experience, the all-pervasive “fiction” that is our reality. The cut-up would thus permit transcendental, as opposed to an objective, experience. 3) Every experience is essentially text that can be

1. To “set forth a view of the arts which does not separate them from the rest of life, but rather confuses the difference between Art and Life, just as it diminishes the distinctions between space and time.” (*A Year From Monday, New Lectures and Writings*, John Cage, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown – Connecticut, 1967, p. 32).

2. “Invade areas where nothing’s definite (areas – micro and macro – adjacent the one we know in). It won’t sound like music – serial or electronic. It’ll sound like we hear when we’re not hearing *music*, just hearing whatever wherever we happen to be. But to accomplish this our technological means must be constantly changing.” (*Ibid.*, p. 27).

3. *The Third Mind*, William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, “Introduction” by W. S. B., The Viking Press – New York / A Seaver Book, 1978.

4. *Ibid.*, “The cut-up method of Brion Gysin” by W. S. B.

read, copied and re-written. 4) Writing as experimental practice implicates the semiotic structure of experience as a space for struggle and guerilla warfare waged particularly from the hideouts of fantasy, dream (and sex, for Acker) against lobotomized life: Our troops operate in the area of dream and myth under guerilla conditions. This area is our cover, just as jungles and mountains serve as cover for three-dimensional guerrilla troops. The enemy is a noncreative parasite. It cannot touch us in this area. Their counter is saturation bombing and blockade of creative personnel¹.

Whatever the parallels may be, Acker's practice and conception of writing irreducibly differs from that of Burroughs and the chance operations artists. One reason being that she relates to her own body as a woman, and as a member of a patriarchal capitalist society, in a very different way than these artists. The fact that Burroughs fantasized, betraying a surreptitious dualism, about his wish to enhance sensitivity for the "outside"² and to reach a "nonbody experience" through the association of thinking images instead of words (because words hide the referent), cannot have equivalence in Acker's work. Because for her, the body isn't a passive object that the free mind can alter and discard, and it's not, either, the enclosure of organic-rational life that imagination should escape. If we're considering Acker's growing feminism, there is no such choice between disembodied and embodied experience, because the body is made of the articulations of experience's structure. The body is, just like the self, a social and historical product, a dimension where domination exerts itself at all levels. Essentialist and scopic fascinations revolving around the non-verbal silence, the disembodied experience, chance and accident as a means to uncover objectivity or to reach "Life", going beyond illusion, would likely have been unconvincing for a woman who, in the early 70s, felt she had no control over her body-mind, was constantly exposed to power relations, and felt her whole sense of reality was jeopardized by a capitalist-patriarchal system that since childhood had defined her and required her to fight back from the place of fiction. Acker, and it is maybe one of the features that makes her so contemporary, chose to represent things and experience as irreducibly problematic, made up of multiple overlapping voices, meanings, and desires. There is no redeeming escape from this layered experience, neither a simulacrum of an escape.

These differences between Acker and the New York 60's avant-gardists evoked here are importantly reflected in the poem Homage to LeRoi Jones. Cut-up, as Acker practices here, doesn't establish connections between images thus expanding one's range of vision³, it destroys the mimetic function of language to make music with it

1. *Ibid.*, "First Recording" by W. S. B.

2. "What I want to do is to learn to see more of what's out there, to look outside, to achieve as far as possible a complete awareness of surroundings." (Interview with William S. Burroughs extracted from the 1966 interview by Conrad Knickerbocker in *Paris Review*, reprinted in *Writers at Work*, 3rd Series – New York, 1967; pub. in *The Third Mind*, William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, The Viking Press – New York / A Seaver Book, 1978, p. [7]).

3. *The Third Mind*, William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, "Interview with William S. Burroughs" by W. S. B., The Viking Press – New York / A Seaver Book, 1978.

(I'm writing music'). It doesn't proceed randomly, but arbitrarily (out of judgement and desire), creating "abstract linguistic sequence" that "break entirely with classical grammar structures"², enhancing LeRoi Jones' research of a new political language. The exercises are thus an iconoclastic dismantling of literature's conventional demands, and language as a means for communication and expression.

230 HOMAGE Reading this title through Burroughs's definition of the cut-up, we can consider that Acker's exercise preserves and renews LeRoi Jones writing: Who wrote the original words is still there in any rearrangement of his or her whatever words.³

230 HOMAGE Acker begins really inhabiting other texts as method. We normally talk about what she's doing here as a deconstruction process, cutting apart. But here she's working with texts that she really likes. Reading Leroi Jones isn't at all like reading Dickens or Harold Robbins: we're already working outside of canon/popular lit, and in radical tradition. So the question becomes: how to inhabit this radical energy? How to emulate, in a way, Jones's project, while magnifying the moments where language becomes explosive, gunpowder material, something that can blast through reason. When I'm reading these "appropriative" texts from this phase, I'm seeing Acker play with them in a movement that's joyful and ecstatic, that's throwing language everywhere and seeing what it can do. It's different than the more explicitly deconstructive feminist method in Acker's 1986 *Don Quixote*, which poet Caroline Bergvall describes like this:

There is a phrase by Kathy Acker that emphasizes a strict causal connection between the existential dilemma as a female writer and the poetic methodology that emerges from it. She writes, "I was unspeakable so I ran into the language of others." This sentence summarizes both her feminist stance and her writing methodology. Acker famously proposed a literary mode which only exists through other texts. It twists itself through other texts. The writer conceives of writing as a collated and plagiarized multiplicity. Cultural pillaging provides a poetic trajectory that negates the authorial voice. The uniqueness of the work is its lack of uniqueness, a process of shadowing and transference.⁴

Bergvall writes this in a book that brings together conceptual writing by writers who identify as women. The question that such a project poses, that my notes that accompany this book also pose, is how to define a position of intervention without essentializing, or hemming-in, that position? Like, how can we even talk about "female" or "feminist" or "afab" writing when the ways that we inhabit those identities are so mutable and contextually specific? Bergvall suspects and I agree that Acker gives us a model for this tricky double-approach. It has to do with both revealing the structures of power

1. Letter to Bernadette Mayer, [October-November 1972], cf. *supra*, p. 226.

2. Georgina Colby, *Kathy Acker: Writing the Impossible*, Edinburgh U Press, 2016, p. 48-49.

3. *The Third Mind*, William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, "The Exterminator" by W. S. B., The Viking Press – New York / A Seaver Book, 1978.

4. Caroline Bergvall, "The Conceptual Twist," *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*, Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012, p. 18.

and not just blowing them up but warping them, building something new, engaging in subversive mutation. Bergvall:

One question irks, underlines, pushes at many of the pieces. It echoes the dissident emptiness expressed by Acker [...] How does one make conceptually-led work that does not do away, ignore, silence or mute some of the messy complications of socio-cultural belonging, but rather collects from the structure itself? The balancing act remains difficult. From research to composition through to realization and distribution, it involves radical rethinks about the codes of literature's production line. The writer finds herself necessarily, structurally destabilized by the denuding undertaking. Or she might become captive to the seductions of the stripping machine.¹

These experiments, with their ecstatic refiguring of existing textual material, can be considered the kind of complicated accumulation that builds from instability. Joy and attraction are here at the heart of new growth. [CF]

231 "the leader sits The "Exercise #1" of *Homage...* is composed using the first seven paragraphs of LeRoi Jones's *The Alternative*² (1965) which read:

The leader sits stradling the bed, and the night, the innocent, blinds him. (Who is our flesh. Our lover, marched here from where we sit now sweating and remembering. Old man. Old man, find me, who am your only blood.)

Sits stradling the bed under a heavy velvet canopy. Home made. The door opened for a breeze, which will not come through the other heavy velvet hung at the opening. (Each thread a face, or smell, rubbed against himself with yellow glasses and fear at their exposure. Death. Death. They (the younger students) run by screaming. The impromptu. Tho dead, themselves.

The leader, at his bed, stuck with 130 lbs black meat sewn to failing bone. A head with big red eyes turning senselessly. Five toes on each foot. Each foot needing washing. And hands that dangle to the floor, tho the boy himself is thin small washed out, he needs huge bleak hands that drag the floor. And a head full of walls and flowers. Blinking lights. He is speaking.

"Yeh?"

The walls are empty, heat at the ceiling. Tho one wall is painted with a lady. (Her name now. In large relief, a faked rag stuck between the chalk marks of her sex. Finley. Teddy's Doris. There sprawled where the wind fiddled with the drying cloth. Leon came in and laughed. Carl came in and hid his mouth, but he laughed. Teddy said, "Aw, Man."

"Come on, Hollywood. You can't beat that. Not with your years. Man,

1. Caroline Bergvall, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

2. Published in the *Transatlantic Review*, n° 18, Spring 1965, p. 46-60.

you're a schoolteacher 10 years after weeping for this old stinking bitch. And hit with an aspirin bottle (myth says)."

The leader, is sprawled, dying. His retinue walk into their comfortable cells. "I have duraw-ings," says Leon, whimpering now in the buses from Chicago. Dead in a bottle. Floats out of sight, until the Africans arrive with love and prestige. "Niggers." Be happy your ancestors are recognized in this burg. Martyrs. Dead in an automat, because the boys had left. Lost in New York, frightened of the burned lady, they fled into those streets and sung their homage to the Radio City.

Homage to Leroi Jones takes LeRoi Jones's short story *The Alternative* as source text for the 1st Exercise. "Comprised of five experimental stanzas, each stanza has as its source text a paragraph of the first five paragraphs of the original literary work. The sequence of the experimental stanzas follow the order of the paragraphs. The exercise opens with the complete opening line of the text, excised and cited as the seed line"¹: the leader sits straddling the bed, and the night, the innocent, blinds him. "The poetic is constructed through a practice of excision and reduction of the prose text. Acker does not make a set procedure for her practice evident anywhere in her notes, as Mac Low did so explicitly in his poetics. Nevertheless, a comparison with the original source text yields insight into Acker's experiment as a form of what might be termed here a method of 'minimalist expansion'. Such a term intentionally points to the paradox, and dialectic, of a simultaneous reduction and non-grammatically centered expansion. Accumulation in Acker's poetic lines is paradoxically bound to reduction and dispossesses the line of a fixed meaning rather than generating fixed meaning."²

232 the the. a. To contextualize this unconventional use of articles Colby references Gertrude Stein, who said in *Poetry and Grammar* that articles are interesting just as nouns and adjectives or not. And why are they interesting just as nouns and adjectives are not. They are interesting because they do what a noun might do if a noun was not so unfortunately so completely unfortunately the name of something. Articles please, a and an and the please as the name that follows cannot please.³ The article is thus valued for its lack of a referent and for its opacity. Isolated articles are ontologically closer to things than to signs.

234 Exercise #2. The "Exercise #2" of *Homage...* is composed from four paragraphs of LeRoi Jones's *Now and Then*⁴ which read:

This musician and his brother always talked about spirits. They were good musicians, talking about spirits, and they had them, the spirits, and soared with them, when they played. The music would climb, and bombard everything, destroying whole civilizations, it seemed. And then I suppose, while they played, whole civilizations, actually were destroyed.

1. G. Colby, *Kathy Acker: Writing the Impossible*, Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 45.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

3. Gertrude Stein, "Poetry and Grammar", in *Look at Me Now and Here I Am*, p. 125.

4. In: *Tales*, Grove Press, 1967, p. 117-125.

Leveled. The nuns whimpered with church spears through their heads. Blind blond babies bled and bled. Dogs ate their mothers and television was extinct except the image burned in it forever, in the future soft museums of our surviving civilization. A black way. A black life. From the ways and roads of the black man living, surviving, being strong.

But when they stopped, the brothers, they were not that strong. Like any of us, the music, their perfection, was their perfect projection of themselves, past any bullshit walking around tied up unspiritual shit. They could be caught with white girls, and talk unintelligibly, or sometimes around one's glasses a little sliver of white fear would idel, and he'd laugh it away, and talk about his music, shadowboxing, practicing his survival and perfection. [...]

[p. 125] another frozen moment (EXCEPT THE RUSH OF ALL THINGS IS THE RUSH OF ALL THINGS AND ON IS STILL EVER WAS AND IS NOW OMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM THE ENDLESS)

[p. 118] Mostly their peters slammed them, and brought them lower than themselves, or the need to live, like to have money, and be whole in the tincan halfassed sense the white man's way, which he put on us, and is still so much a part of our lives. (A man on the radio explaining blackpower.)

I mean they could only talk when they were not playing

238 "I hid out The "Exercise #4" of *Homage...* is composed from "Neutrals: The Vestibule", the opening chapter of LeRoi Jones's *The System of Dante's Hell* (Grove Press, 1965) which read:

But Dante's hell is heaven. Look at things in another light. Not always the smarting blue glare pressing through the glass. Another light, or darkness. Wherever we'd go to rest. By the simple rivers of our time. Dark cold water slapping long wooden logs jammed 10 yards down in the weird slime, 6 or 12 of them hold up a pier. Water, wherever we'd rest. And the first sun we see each other in. Long shadows down off the top where we were. Down thru gray morning shrubs and low cries of waked up animals.

Neutrals: The breakup of my sensibility. First the doors. The brown night rolling down bricks. Chipped stone stairs in the silence. Vegetables rotting in the neighbors' minds. Dogs wetting on the buildings in absolute content. Seeing the pitied. The minds of darkness. Not even sinister. Breaking out in tears along the sidewalks of the season. Gray leaves outside the junkshop. Sheridan Square blue men under thick quivering smoke. Trees, statues in a background of voices. Justice, Égalité. Horns break the fog with trucks full of dead chickens. Motors. Lotions.

The neutrals run jewelry shops & shit in silence under magazines.

Women disappear into Canada. They painted & led interminable lives. They marched along the sides of our cars in the cold brown weather. They wore corduroy caps & listened to portables. The world was in their eyes. They wore rings & had stories about them. They walked halfway back from school with me. They were as tall as anyone else you knew. Some sulked, across the street out of sight, near the alley where the entrance to his home was. A fat mother. A fat father with a mustache. Both houses, and the irishman's near the playground. Balls went in our yards. Strong hitters went in Angel's. They all lived near everything.

A house painter named Ellic, The Dog, "Flash." Eddie, from across the street. Black shiny face, round hooked nose, beads for hair. A thin light sister with droopy socks. Smiling. Athletic. Slowed by bow legs. Hustler. Could be made angry. Snotty mouth. Hopeless.

*

The mind fastens past landscapes. Invisible agents. The secret trusts. My own elliptical. The trees' shadows broaden. The sky draws together darkening. Shadows beneath my fingers. Gloom grown under my flesh.

*

Or fasten across the lots, the gray garages, roofs suspended over cherry trees. The playground fence. Bleakly with guns in the still thin night. Shadows of companions drawn out along the ground. Newark Street green wood, chipped, newsstands. Dim stores in the winter. Thin brown owners of buicks.

And this not the first. Not beginnings. Smells of dreams. The pickles of the street's noise. Fire escapes of imagination. To fall off to death. Unavailable. Delayed into whispering under hurled leaves. Paper boxes roll down near the pool. From blue reflection, through the fence to the railroad. No trains. The walks there and back to where I was. Night queens in winter dusk. Drowning city of silence. Ishmael back, up through the thin winter smells. Conked hair, tweed coat, slightly bent at the coffee corner. Drugstore, hands turning the knob for constant variation. Music. For the different ideas of the world. We would turn slowly and look. Or continue eating near the juke box. Theories sketch each abstraction. Later in his old face ideas were ugly.

Or be wrong because of simple movement. Not emotion. From under all this. The weight of myself. Not even with you to think of. That settled. Without the slightest outside.

[Letter to Bernadette Mayer]

kathy acker

(ca. fall 1972)

[Solana Beach, ca. fall 1972]

dear Bernadette! dear Ed! this typewriter doesn't work and neither
does my spelling typing! enclosed find poem/writeout of begin-
ning of story by L.J. MY POEM I'm doing the same thing process
of cut up to all writing I'm doing it feels terrific! there are no
poets here besides David so I'm going crazy and have to write
to people there are thousands of musicians some artists. aren't
categories great. all I do is write have sex talk about my sex and
other peoples! talk about music. I don't have your copy of STORY
B. could you send me copy also copy if have extra of C.C.'s SPACE
I can't get it here I'M DESPERATE FOR BOOKS S.O.S. say hello
to Jackson etc. heard you're going to read with him that should be
terrific. asked David if he could arrange reading for you here, he
said no but if you come here he can get you reading for \$150.00
(about). maybe also something for your movie? there are lots of
film video crap etc. around. it's great to walk down the street and
not get followed. I don't have any money owe \$400.00 to friends
looking madly not too madly for job. I really love doing cut up like
destroying every thing and making music out of it especially like
writing absolutely anything I want because I know it's going to
be destroyed. of course I'm getting the two of you mixed up and
sometimes talking to one sometimes to other sometimes to both
mostly not clear not making anything clear so excuse. also eating
cheese. this place is paradise if I can survive absence of poets
and BOOKS. gotta write to Harris. address is Me/ 136 1/2 North
Sierra/ Solana Beach, Ca. 92075. send books will pay commission
anything I'll send POEMS BACK LOTS OF POEMS ENDLESS
NUMBERS OF CUT*UPS NEED POET TALK

*miss you both
a lot
Love*

*LOVE
Kathy*

EDITORIAL NOTE.

This letter is part of the 15 letters (24 pages of typewritten and manuscript text) archived at UCSD Library Special Collections & Archives – United Artists Records – Kathy Acker to Bernadette Mayer – Mss. 1, Box 1, Folder 1.

The transcription was made from a 2014 scan.

It is an undated typewritten letter. Probably from November 1972.

Notes:

252 I'm doing the same thing process of cut up to all writing I'm doing I feels terrific! Acker's describing the experiments that she's doing right now as "cut-up," in that she's manipulating different text materials and arranging them. But the finished things that she's making aren't just random arrangements that accentuate chance and disjunction. She's into music: I really love doing cut up like destroying every thing making music out of it especially like writing absolutely anything I want because I know it's going to be destroyed... and space, as we've seen through her breath-stop experiments. What we get from this mix of cut-up plus sound composition plus reflection of the space dynamics of both page and city is a 3D object, text pieces that don't collapse backwards into disjunctive cuts but jump forward. During this period, as Acker is developing the visual practice that she'll get more involved with in Blood & Guts... and after, I want to draw some parallels between her practice and that of the poet Hannah Weiner. Acker will read with Weiner in 1974 (cf. infra, p. 568), and she's been writing about Hannah as a friend since her DIARY texts. So we know that she was familiar with Weiner's poetry, but what are some potential circulations between Weiner's work and Acker's? In 1974, a couple of years after this letter, Weiner will write her Clairvoyant Journal, which consists of dense pages packed with text that gets everywhere: text written over text, text that slides out of angular areas and slides around, different voices that are combined by visual overlay instead of collaged together on the level of the sentence.

it's no comfort comfort at all that he saw a light around my head what do you expect a hat? say anything worthwhile NO SECRET celibate omit this Jesus Christ gave the rest of the wine to cool off because it said GIVE THE WINE TO HER expect trouble gave it to Bernadette even though roots can't get drunk this pronoun. You aren't obeying orders involving SHE after color lingerie see Jackson alright talking the forces kept saying READ READ or was it thoughts of Ed and others safe in the room? Big colorful letters from Kathy Acker turquoise WILL between her eyes. jump damn fool reader don type Dream of prostituting myself to some ugly man relax Kathy's dream¹

It's a technique that Weiner invents to convey her actual experience of seeing words written on objects and people, "activated by a trauma in the late 1960s" in the words

1. "march 1974 CLAIRVOYANT JOURNAL — I see words on my forehead, in the air, on other people, on the typewriter, on the page. These appear in the text in CAPITALS or underlines,"

of Kathleen Fraser.¹ The effect is a visual object that mirrors the author's actual movement through space, and her perception of how language operates within that space. There are stylistic echoes of Acker's *DIARY* texts, but in Weiner the same type of syntax is smeared across the page in complex overlapping fields, contrasting to the breath and space work that Acker is experimenting with at the time. But if we read Weiner and Acker together we hear proto beats of the texts that directs the reader's movement in Acker's maps: I'm scared of everything, that's what life is until I change completely / a desolate country. gray air. / --> occasional hills / --> a dirt road gray and brown hard soil with no vegetation. the dim gray light never changes --> I can't stand it when anyone tells me I'm not a writer.² [CF]

Hannah Weiner, *Personal Injury Magazine*, ed. by Mike Sappol (NYC), n° 3, 11/15/1976, p. 21-26.

1. Kathleen Fraser, in *Moving Borders: Three Decades of Innovative Writing by Women*, ed. Mary Margaret Sloan, New Jersey: Talisman House, 1998, p. 650.

2. Kathy Acker, Dream Map Two. Original artwork from *Blood and Guts in Highschool* (1978). Kathy Acker Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University. In Georgina Colby, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

Entrance into
Dwelling in
Paradise

kathy acker

(fall 1972)

ENTRANCE INTO

DWELLING IN

PARADISE

Kathy Acker

Fall 72

[1] the gate was arched like a great hall and over walls and
 roof ramped vines with grapes of many colors; the red
 like rubies and the blacks like ebonies; and beyond it
 lay a bower of trellised boughs growing fruits single
 and composite, and small birds on branches sang with
 melodious recite,
 and the thousand-noted nightingale shrilled with her
 varied shrigh; the turtle with her cooing filled the site;
 the blackbird whistled like human wight and the ring-dove
 moaning a drinker in grievous plight.
 the trees grew in perfection all edible growths and
 the trees grew in perfection all edible growths and
 the trees grew in perfection all edible
 growths and the trees grew in perfection all
 edible growths trees the rod grew in perfection
 all edible the trees grew growths sand in
 perfection all
 edible growths and
 and the thousand-noted blackbird fruited all manner
 the turtle with her cooing blossomed the violet
 the blackbird whistled gars the loveliest
 cheeks the ring-dove were all blush with
 and despite
 and
 the fruits which what manner of the entrance into
 sweet water, cool and pleasant, this. no manner
 of
 and into wine quench in me anguish what really
 reality is what paradise is Nixon wins Biggest Land-
 slide in History what paradise is One Million People Die

what para-equal will

how then how slippery how viole(n)t how

cryful hop blood hill murder hens squinch the

musicians to exquisite temperance burn a

[2]

fire buildings magazines earlier the library the trees refuse

the camphor-apricot the almond-apricot the apricot

Khorasani

the cherry the fig no need for other people (than me) need

for other people like the cherry as the cherry beyond the

cherry runs the chariot the 7 black horses without

trappings the 7 Valkyries is paradise? is murder

paradise short of trappings tar-baby-paper have

an abortion while you you're 8 hours a day is para-

dise is insanity the people vote for McGovern (or

Nixon) or the Militant paradise stick a finger down your throat

shovel down as much as possible a thousand years ago oranges pink

coral marguerite rose myrtle with the blood-red murder the middle

of is paradise how do I have any conception want to

die want to die a custom ed in the say of Nixon

creep the bondage of slaves lasted for

I work 8 hours a day destroy my body body is the object

the slave-market I'm a slave writer a girl red runs

on stage gaze at the beauty naked sweet water, cool

and pleasant, bought by the 7 murderers for their

pleasure

the latticed windows of my lamps

I have to

- [3] the and trellised arched ebonies; birds edible composite,
fruits like red growing and the great recite edible grew

(Descartes)

trees

viole(n)ts

pansies

a hair wraps around a purple
slice of heart

3 fingers

the archway extends across the nature of murderers the
gar den the second dream sequence written at 11:40 I'm
feeling like shit get along with Hannah (I am) I can't cite
down

peacocks my nightmares all these invulnerable thoughts my
great beauty I can try to talk to Hannah third dream
tomorrow tell her she's scared I should do everything to help
her relax I want to be alone Greta Garbo Scylla and Charibidis
I don't know how to return. I'm not as naive 3 years 3 bad
struggling years I don't talk about my self (feelings) I don't
know how to begin wrapping around a I see few people but
Peter find other people make me tense act frenzy in a way I don't
like myself to act I dislike Peter when he's my only company
after having been alone for a long time I act insane junkmad
seeing other humans want to fuck everyone. Here I am again

- [4] the violence use repetition keep the music now anarchism
the music tne tne tne tne tne tne tne 5/4
the rain/on the other side gllg gllg gllg gllg 4/4

I'm farting fucking some much craziness I can tell in my self
 fear of fucking guys wanting power over guys the dancing shove
 my cunt thigh etc. in sailor's face just as he lights up I move
 away over to the next sailor I don't get sexually turned on
 the other women wear dresses cut cunts shove up their dresses
 on the street I'm horny fuck fuck I don't masturbate (I masturbate
 at least twice a day) in dressingroom on floor on reds (barbs) naked
 one woman if I don't do what my boyfriend wants he won't fuck me
 I'm HORNY why don't you fuck his friends that's how it's usually
 done I'm working on it run out on to the stage wait for me
 everyone wants to play with my dingaling kicks legs in air one
 woman runs high fever have to pay bills clap for these girls I
 never came until a year ago I couldn't figure out why they kept
 making a fuss about it Willy enters pinches 4 breasts leaps on
 a woman I'm horny I pass by him making out with someone in the
 corner I'm the freak have you ever thought about being bisexual
 I like women better than men you like sensitive intellectual men
 I like em younger than me they stay away from me when I get home
 now anarchism the dissolving of beauty exist Dream Sequence
 1/14/72 joined to 1970 some time silver the rain stops I shit
 good shit cause I start eating vegetables again Lizzy's and
 Agatha's kittens die no events as in living life I get
 home I constantly cold which is mental every thing I don't like
 sex no I'm too lazy to cruise for a woman irritate that not doing
 what I want take out on Peter scared in any way let go control
 on Peter

[5]

[6]

**WORKING
SET**

the gate was arched like a great hall and over walls
 gate and with like and trellised and with in growths
 vines gate with beyond of...lay a branches like
 grapes hall the of and roof small and and composite,
 branches sang colors; fruits of composite, trees and like a
 roof like many ... red vines composite, a the edible
 all was like the grapes small single the boughs many
 with over single beyond gate in colors; like and ebonies;
 great lay growths in the arched with roof composites, walls
 single and composite, and small birds in branches sang
 a roof colors; blacks a single branches trees edible
 the sang trellised grapes arched birds many all a ramped
 sang a recite with like perfection with colors; melodious
 walls great perfection beyond hall and ... and bower rubies
 ramped all the hall and birds fruits a arched recite
 bower small blacks colors; hall recite like like a and
 with melodious recite ... the trees grew in perfection all
 on lay small perfection rubies and sang and growths blacks
 grapes on and gate all a and trellised vines the
 it lay a bower of trellised boughs growing fruits
 like and many the lay fruits on the all the
 of like was melodious growing and the blacks great
 the all walls gate branches and ebonies; on was great and
 hall rew and rubies walls recite the the single the
 was over grapes rubies beyond boughs small melodious and
 gate and with red the and in birds like vines
 arched grew single ... in trees it of the and
 the perfection with like and growing of many the
 the trees and single ebonies; birds was and ... edible
 and roof ramped vines with grapes of many colors; the

[7]

[8]

trellised ramped the beyond red fruits growths edible growing
arched walls of and it growing birds recite ... perfection
ebonies; with growths small it like on colors; edible and
birds and the lay boughs bower like like blacks over.
edible growths and the the hall vines red ebonies; of
composite, sang grew of melodious sang beyond ramped
fruits boughs it red grew red like rubies and the blacks
like ebonies; and beyond many rubies vines a
red and in boughs and perfection fruits roof trees bower
growing was boughs and with like of and it trellised
and a melodious growths and arched it the blacks
the of grapes great bower the branches trees melodious
great composite, ebonies; grew branches ramped and
recite the rubies the over trellised walls over like and
edible and bower and the on with ramped growing roof
grew of lay over

the and trellised arched ebonies; birds edible composite,
fruits like red growing and the great recite edible grew

[9]

edible the growing perfection I mur der
mur

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The text reproduced here is a 10-page typescript, archived at Duke University Libraries, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library – Kathy Acker Papers – Box 22 – Folder 18.

The pages are unnumbered except the first two pages: 1-2.

On top of pages [3] and [9], superposed diagonally on the two lines: **the and trellised arched ebonies; birds edible composite, / fruits like red growing and the great recite edible grew.** As the handwritten addition is repeated in two separate places, but always over the same words we can assume that the handwritten text is a significant addition, drawing attention to a specific moment of tension in the poem.

Transcribed from a digital copy of the original typescript.

Acker's handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to original pagination for the two first pages, and our pagination for the remaining pages.

Entrance into Dwelling in Paradise was written in the fall of 1972, very probably in Solana Beach where Kathy Acker was living with Peter Gordon. The text indicates that Acker might have already begun her job as a stripper in San Diego, when she wrote this piece.

Notes:

259 (Descartes)// trees/ viole(n)ts/ pansies/ a hair wraps around a purple/ slice of heart/ 3 fingers/ the archway extends across the nature of murderers the gar den the second dream sequence written at 11:40 I'm feeling like shit get along with Hannah With Entrance into Dwelling in Paradise we're in a constructed text-scape that congeals around word sculptures made from other texts and arranged into an Acker garden. We walk through it in a metabolic haze of her central preoccupations: existing text, tarot, Peter, president, body, (anti)Descartes and it's like when we leave it we're on the threshold of her first serial work, The Childlike Life... That project starts with the iconic **Intention: I become a murderess by repeating in words the lives of other murderesses and Entrance drops us off on the phrase edible the growing perfection I mur**^{der}_{mur}

What are some tools for thinking through this garden made of chewed-up experience and documented time? In her essay on the open text, a text that generatively comes to its meaning through its reading, in collectivity with the reader, poet Lyn Hejinian writes:

The relationship of form, or the 'constructive principle,' to the 'materials' of the work (its ideas, the conceptual mass, but also the words themselves) is the initial problem for the 'open text,' one that faces each writing anew. Can form make the primary chaos (i.e., raw material, unorganized impulse and information, uncertainty, incompleteness, vastness) articulate without depriving it of its capacious vitality, its generative power? Can form go even further than that and actually generate that potency, opening uncertainty to curiosity, incompleteness to speculation, and turning vastness into plenitude? In my opinion, the

answer is yes; that is, in fact, the function or form of art. Form is not a fixture but an activity.¹

If form is an activity, then *Dwelling* seems mostly to act out eating. Eating as digestive, as a metabolic function that spurts out energy. Eileen Myles talks about an embodied kind of lesbian digestion, which for her comes down to taking up all the time that you want. Myles writes, "If anything, my work is about being inside your body and taking your time and taking your space, telling it your own way [...]. And that's ... important in terms of being a female and a lesbian—that you can take that time."² The implication is that there's a specific feminist intervention that happens in the consumption and digestion of time. We're seeing shades of the kind of feminist time and documentation experiment that Bernadette Mayer will perform in her future text *Midwinter Day*,³ but with a concrete excretion that's way more metabolic. Acker's masticated version of the text is the residue of her experience of reading and of thinking through multiple texts and events simultaneously. Acker writes in *My Death, My Life*, by Pier Paolo Pasolini:

To substitute space for time. What's this mean? I'm not talking about death. Death isn't my province. When this happens that's that; it's the only thing or event god or shit knows what it is that isn't life. To forget. To get rid of history. I'm telling you right now burn the schools. They teach you about good writing. That's a way of keeping you from writing what you want to, says Enzensberger, from revolutionary that is present. I just see. Each of you must use writing to do exactly what you want. Myself or any occurrence is a city through which I can wander if I stop judging.

Acker's characteristic "bad writing" happens between space and time, as the digestive residue of wandering through a space – texts, dreams, the garden, the city.⁴ [CF]

257 the gate The text opens with excerpted lines of Burton's 36th *Arabian Nights*⁵, putting Burton's poetic prose into verse. The experiment seems to stem out of Burton's multi-layered descriptions, a formal decision that intensifies the work's cumulative effect (cf. repetition of non-grammatical "and"). Acker uses the theme of paradise to create a parallel with California, which she has officially adopted as her new home ("dwelling"), while also using it as a counter-point against which her economic

1. Lyn Hejinian, "The Rejection of Closure," *Writing/Talks*, ed. Bob Perelman, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985.

2. Eileen Myles quoted in Maggie Nelson, *Women, The New York School, and Other True Abstractions*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011, p. 173.

3. See note on Mayer and *Midwinter Day*, cf. *supra*, p. 96.

4. Kathy Acker, *My Death, My Life*, by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1984 UK, 1988 US), in *The Essential Acker*, op. cit., p. 196.

5. And not from Milton's *Paradise Lost* as "presumed" Chris Kraus (*After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 72).

situation and political context are put into relief (what really/ reality is what paradise is One Million People Die). The text of Burton reads:

The gate was arched like a great hall and over walls and roof ramped vines with grapes of many colours; the red like rubies and the black like ebonies; and beyond it lay a bower of trelliced boughs growing fruits single and composite, and small birds on branches sang with melodious recite, and the thousand-noted nightingale shrilled with her varied shrigh; the turtle with her cooing filled the site; the blackbird whistled like human wight and the ring-dove moaned like a drinker in grievous plight. The trees grew in perfection all edible growths and fruited all manner fruits which in pairs were bipartite; with the camphor-abricot, the almond-apricot and the apricot "Khorasani" hight; the plum, like the face of beauty, smooth and bright; the cherry that makes teeth shine clear by her sleight, and the fig of three colours, green, purple and white.

257 edible growths and Georgina Colby analyzes the "declivity" starting with edible growths and in the following way: "The first three instances of the repeated sentence edge toward the margin of the page, each line is given a much greater indentation than the previous line. Yet these lines remain legible. The following four lines are rendered increasingly illegible by Acker's practice of writing over the words with the manual typewriter. The visual effect produced by this practice is a textual congestion, brought about by the constraints of the right hand margin of the material page. There is not enough space for words on the page when pushed to the edges by Acker's practice. The clogging of letters in the overwritten words creates a verbal blockage that renders the words unreadable. This practice of illegibility runs counter to the idyllic image of the trees growing in perfection and the organic richness of the 'edible growths' in the original text. In Acker's text the hard materiality of the word defies organic decomposition. The conjunction 'and', which in the unaltered line indicated continuation and abundance, is negated in Acker's writing strategies, becoming instead an opaque mark of excess and further textual pollution."¹ It is hard to know if the overwriting was intended as part of the piece or constitutes a later correction, but in any case, Colby's analysis still holds. In this transcription, the words that Acker wrote over have been crossed out. Repetition is one of the experimental procedures that becomes part of Acker's lifelong strategies, and we see her testing its effects in this period, particularly between 1972 and 1974, as is perhaps best exemplified by the play with repetition in *I Dreamt I Became a Nymphomaniac! :Imagining* (written ca. summer 1974).

260 the dancing In San Diego, when writing the text, Kathy Acker had probably traded the live sex shows for a job at a strip club. According to Mel Frelicher, she used the pseudonym "Target" (chosen by her boss, not by her) and "would do an interpretive strip to 'Che' by Ornette Coleman, after carefully explaining to the audience

1. G. Colby, *Kathy Acker: Writing the Impossible*, Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 56.

of mostly sailors who Che was and why he was so venerable".¹ Contrary to what Chris Kraus relates, "Kathy Kat" wasn't Acker's pseudonym but referred to another of her colleagues (cf. *infra*, p. 339 and 341).² Through this piece, Acker introduces her colleagues' voices, fragments of speeches she probably overheard in the **dressingroom**, as she would explain later. It seems to have been while she was working at the strip club in San Diego, and writing from the materials she accumulated at work (images, sounds) that she began to work with the multiplying, fast-moving "I". Appropriating the "I" of others without transforming it into a third person and without using quotation marks. This page of *Entrance into Dwelling...* may be one of the earliest example of the practice.

1. Mel Freilicher, "One or two things I know about Kathy Acker", 1999; quoted in *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 77. — For more informations about Acker sex working in San Diego, cf. *infra*, p. 328-329, editorial notes for *Sripper Disintegration*.

2. Cf. *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 77.

[Exercises]

kathy acker

(ca. fall 1972)

Exercise #1 : Create Music Through Repetitions or Own Sounds

"We discuss cats."

Date of Abortions: 10/28/72, 11/2/72

homage is is abortion is delight is delectation is trial is
 annoyance is is life is a way
 abortion delight is ferry fur way is a way wage is
 reaction no is no is not a
 is abortion
 is delight reaction
 live quietly is
 red suns means pollution
 continued cramps dead child remains
 temperature the sun
 is a way of
 alive
 on a week night the action. reaction violet is way who joins
 is not dramatic
 we sleep a lot O we used to fuck
 A purr all the crap in the body needs to come out we
 are you at this instant fucking join remaining means
 ferry a way far port salute recall make act
 violently

 is a way of
 plant violets.
 imagine gold dust the musicians desperate despair

[2]

caring no seizing imagine
the flight of plants into deep space tendrils curling
homage io the frozen blank look the moon
bombs
caring plants into living green fleas sprout through orange
purr plants
seizing space blanket light
light
of all of seizing every possession catwalk around
entire block without touching street
when steal bricks where blackpants black shirt do
not drive up to bricks
guards plant light the musicians of desiring
4 out of the head the eyes
gold no gold musicians steal imagine set
fuck heroine fleas bomb are without are
entire city plans a large brain without body no
womenmen drive up to rid gold desperate
insane frightened
rape heroine her o factory-workers say set plants
on machete gold of all is a way plant
plan net rides the black brain fright for desperate
the city cosmos rises entire plans drive

MURDERERS-CRIMINALS JOIN SUNLIGHT

musician spirits.

gold musician spiritfuck inessence cry out NOW
destroy all ways living fuck every one orange cat black
cat why not anar why not open
get out of here too many people too much music cry sensu
lights swim out murderers-criminals join sunlight New York
is ghost grey cock my cunt ask ends light ferry-boat
light fish swirl beneath waters
ask. ask crying insane halo I never leave you goose
you again how big are your boobies SWAM jazz
doesn't take
off from anything holy sex ascend I'm insane why not
come n o l l slinker cat white steal wood
swords cut off Nixon's cock
paradise is

out of the huge shadows from ice pick silver ring
what the fuck you want now hippies enter commie fuck
hippies we're going to fly
destoy. do again
is musicians ripechange photo equipment electrolysis
high-faluting black black is revolt revulsion revolution
react rename resign might think computerize d destroyed is
Peter musicians crazy jewels scientific

tonsilitis spelling braincraze power bear girlscout
 woman lover women lover brain blow elect rode be
 rode sleep pleasure peak 180° F purple no roy pack
 from shickle please peas purtout into winter city-
 suck cripp shit where war murder signsout internal
 jags brass jewboy \$ vert re in conseq instit ute fire
 braze fractice grow night grasp flying
 paradise is murder is paradise? is my love dead
 where does she/he lie my desire is your pleasure I
 know you well me and I you like birds we fade
 into the sun seeking that region without night I follow
 you
 you me arms limbs twine moving and unmoving again like
 birds the criminals of now we sing without reason alone
 apart as each limb decays the flesh turns grey the
 eyes slither
 from their sockets the brain turns into itself and we sink
 into ourselves what will remain the knife burns the
 peacocks
 stroll through blue grass is murderers-criminals
 is city is peacocks is solitude is pleasure
 murderer-criminal knife fries *colon*
 [10] knives flash white body approach knives flash green silver
 cosmo slither how by word by gest by touch of robot claw
 crypt techno steal revenge not house castle by wayside
 growd in flire flight split into blue body enlargens grows
 mad loops guns machines comput brains
 flash sky
 flash hair 50 last ing no music where's music muse crap
 con con who ghost grab lights 5 men cocks turds up

who flash lights ferry sails out of cunt woe
 musicians run angels crap killers touch desire cats clink
 heads
 fuck fat-ass 1. grass trees where we your arms wind
 like coils of hair sair tear
 beautiful criminals beautiful robbers fantastic hijackers
 O you destroyers of banks FBI insane coops
 grap spling to I whatshit plap in 4 I U I O U
 I O U A
 flight to my brain brain of us all. grab ap no comet sank
 sarp cosmos space upon space stars blink out deep blue
 no thing sliversilver revile turn upon itself amino
 acids medicine junkup red sliver twine sluck an explosion!
 (a million pears) red freak balls crap cry out comets
 kiss on platinum cats fly in grace stoned we're stoned
 wiiiink lap brainopenings brainscaresflats brain telep jetliner
 747 staircases wind bottles colors booze oose the liver
 noise returns now we fright no up down swirl colors
 oscillate flit murker crap instant refly all in cor p p t
 p t p t p t p tu teat no breast – planet I am Fur
 yap in set plant wide tur race flames buildings flame
 sapling I

[1] MURDRERS RUN (ON) THE MOON

Exercise #6: Transformation of Sentences

O A

O A O an 10 black scarass marriage I high bolster
 O AI U O as I par I as into light see k source A after
 knives floaton junk children make the I join
 fur ry blasts is is ostrich I ark whirl pat blastin O and
 1,000 shoreon no a emotions mountain diary
 wrang no pardon in in an in after AI and hearts down
 cheese a bord (t) undercrap snow you they are black
 nailed they walk down street leather jackets U they
 silver when make taxidis light ice axsane sunlight
 leather bracelets huge boots high heels Doctor Doo O are
 forget in ferry in up otters I in Mrs. Chimp no one
 can get neat them you see 10 knives as black silver a
 Saturday tax fleather walrus sing sane 1,000 hearts
 silver forget silver run silver cuss silver I nailed
 run black rock what incense I you start repeat shiv
 farce later I'm pregnant in crap in sane par they
 silver I slip I in sect flake mursh ax uck flat our
 black floaton shoreon down when in a black I fade
 I walk cuss fade cream you pell you I meet disappear
 goodbye goodbye goodbye into down silver disappear
 puke comes an arsk black Dr. I Peter light street
 repeat goodbye follow and a I feather no twat/nontwat
 bitch/bitch bitch/bitchier job/music see leather shiv
 goodbye press tuxa distinct firtle you pees musicians.
 gold fleece fleec ing up sack dream k jackets farce
 goodbye in a light you destroy burts scarass junk

[2]

no cheese make ferry Saturday rack slip source
 leather late I on trucks rup I shingles cream
 puke follow press in on ant cat cat go let in
 of bracelets I'm Peter ant are. I annihilate eggs
 fac insu lat 0 plot back car white tail fur huge
 pregnant twat/cat gold tint you out marriage puke
 marriage children a bord (t) taxilust in tax what I
 you comes and tuxa a fucks are. ry boots in nontwat
 cat you bomb good gold I make emotions undercrap
 light up fleather blasts high crap bitch/go slal
 I wave I purr incense insect pell an a distinct
 light is heels in bitch let I no cunt cunt scrit
 high the mountain snow ice otters walrus I flake you
 is Doctor sane bitch/in come you fur fur scrip arsk
 I firtle you rup I tint you slal I come ostrich Doo
 uck bitchier fac you stert you scrif you fern ing I
 suck off you priss I slink you I Mrs. flat job/insu
 fern I delight in bolster I diary you axsane I sing
 you mursh ark Chimp our music lat ing crap slink
 sight I black feather you destroy I annihilate you
 bomb whirl no musicians. O I you pas fur I no
 you start I crap you up I blow you pat one gold plot
 suck up 0 ry off blastin can fleece back off I
 groin fish join sunlight in sane stert ax meet Dr.
 no wrang get fleec car you blow fuck swim pees

[U N S O R T E D P A G E]

[11] O sisters spirits.

sisters suck plat grab cats up (for Melvin who wants me to write
so “the people” can understand what I
write.)

4 no crap bam sis sis mur flashing

paradise
clasps

The text reproduced here is a 8-page typescript, archived at Duke University Libraries, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library – Kathy Acker Papers – Box 22 – Folder 20 – Writing Asystematically.

The pages are partially numbered. “Exercise #1” is unnumbered; “Exercise #3” is numbered 8-10; “Exercise #6” is numbered 1-2. What we have numbered [11] is an unsorted page.

Transcribed from a digital copy of the original typescript.

Acker’s handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to the typescript’s original pagination, except for “Exercise #1” where the pagination is ours.

Notes:

270 Create Music Through Repetitions or Own Sounds Georgina

Colby provides an excellent analytical grid that you can start reading this poem from:

“Writing Asystematically”, ... shows Acker moving towards experimenting with the longer line. The title points to the idea of writing not structured according to a system or method [...]. The exercise is valuable in revealing Acker experimenting with neologisms, non-referential language, innovative compound words, and letter sequences: techniques of illegibility that are precursors to the instants of illegibility that permeate Blood and Guts in High School. Such antiabsorptive experimental structures function in Acker’s work to create languages that run counter to ordinary language.¹

If you read this text out loud you get a constant pulse that runs through the vowels on the first page, racing through the a’s and o’s until you get to the stacked up words, images, and “antiabsorptive” parts (where the language doesn’t give us any obvious meaning that we can identify with, but scatters like in p t p t p t p t u near the end). It’s another example of Acker’s interest in musical movement and rhythm.

But I also want to focus on the other part of the protocol, after “create music” and “We discuss cats,” there’s Date of Abortions: 10/28/72, 11/2/72. Acker talks a lot about abortion in interviews that she does around Don Quixote. To Ellen Friedman, she talks about starting to copy out Cervantes because she was waiting to get an abortion and couldn’t concentrate and needed something to do with her hands. Abortion in that case became the generative condition of possibility for the kind of procedural work that she did in Don Quixote, and is present everywhere in the explicit 80s feminist consciousness that characterizes that book. Here we have another version of abortion as condition for production. But abortion is presented to us throughout these early texts and letters less in terms of its relation with procedure and time, like in Don Quixote, and more in terms of how it forces a specific embodied relation with the writing. In this segment we have

1. Georgina Colby, *op. cit.*, p. 53-54.

continued cramps dead child remains, in other letters she talks about being in tons of pain. Her 1993 article titled (significantly) "Writing Praxis" starts with "Three days ago, prior to the abortion I had today, I hurt."¹ By starting the essay with her abortion, Acker indicates that abortion, writing, and pain (although variably defined) are at the center of her praxis, or embodied practice. In the 1993 essay on praxis she's talking about psychological pain, she says that she hurts because she actually wanted a child but couldn't support it. Acker's writing is stuffed full of pain, affective and physical. Maybe because, as Elaine Scarry has written, pain is one of the few feelings that is impossible to truly convey: we can never really feel another person's pain. In this sense pain becomes a generative screen, a place of connection and attempted empathy. Pain is a site for building collectivity.

If we follow pain through abortion to "personal romantic disaster" we arrive at Acker's later theorizations of the generative pain of bodybuilding, which we can read through the prism of these early text forms that are scattered with mentions of pain. In a 1991 essay Acker writes:

About a year and a half ago, a combination of personal romantic disaster and seemingly uncontrollable career upheaval had me gasping: I could and no way of dealing with what was happening to me and only felt pain. Trying to run away from pain, I only increased it.

I had been trained as an intellectual. I had learned that my rational mind is capable of thinking anything about anything and that, though a marvelous tool, the mind is an untrustworthy source of the truth. My intellectual training had given me no tools by which to deal with pain.

I began to distrust training that involves only the mind, education that ignores the body.

In order to deal with pain, for pain was dealing with me, I turned to the body. There was nowhere else to go. I said, I'm going to go to school in the body. I said, I'm mad. I've always been mad.

I had just moved from London back to New York City in an effort to escape pain. There's no escape. Since there was already a budding acquaintance between me and bodybuilding, I decided that it was high time to go to bodybuilding school.

There is a cliché in bodybuilding, "No pain, no gain". In New York City, I found a trainer. The first day I met him, he wrote down in a notebook, "That which does not kill you will make you grow. F. Nietzsche."

This is what I want, I thought. To go to school in pain.²

1. Kathy Acker, "Writing Praxis", *Conjunctions* 21, 1993, p. 303

2. Kathy Acker, "Bodybuilding," 1991. I found this text in the archival documents presented at the exhibition *KATHY ACKER Get Rid of Meaning*, op cit. I don't know if it was actually published, but it looks like it was meant to appear in *Allure* magazine, based on the beginning of the typescript that reads "FAX TO: Karen Marta, Allure, 360 Madison Avenue, NYC, NY 10017, fax #1-212-370-1949. FROM: Kathy Acker, tel. no. 1-415-759-6651." At

We've already seen how part of Acker's project is invested in alternative pedagogical projects, the unconventional schools of sex and reading for pleasure instead of for knowledge. Here pain, through bodybuilding, gets added to her school project. In these experiments, Acker uses abortion to evoke a generative connection with the reader that mirrors the various experiments with entry/impermeability that she's practicing in these exercises, and she gives us one entry in to her "school in pain," which is also a collective project of embodied relearning. [CF]

the end of the text on the last page is typed "-by Kathy Acker, c 1991" with the c circled by hand in black pen.

The continuing saga of war and drugs

Part 1: Stripper Disintegration

kathy acker

(2-3/1973)

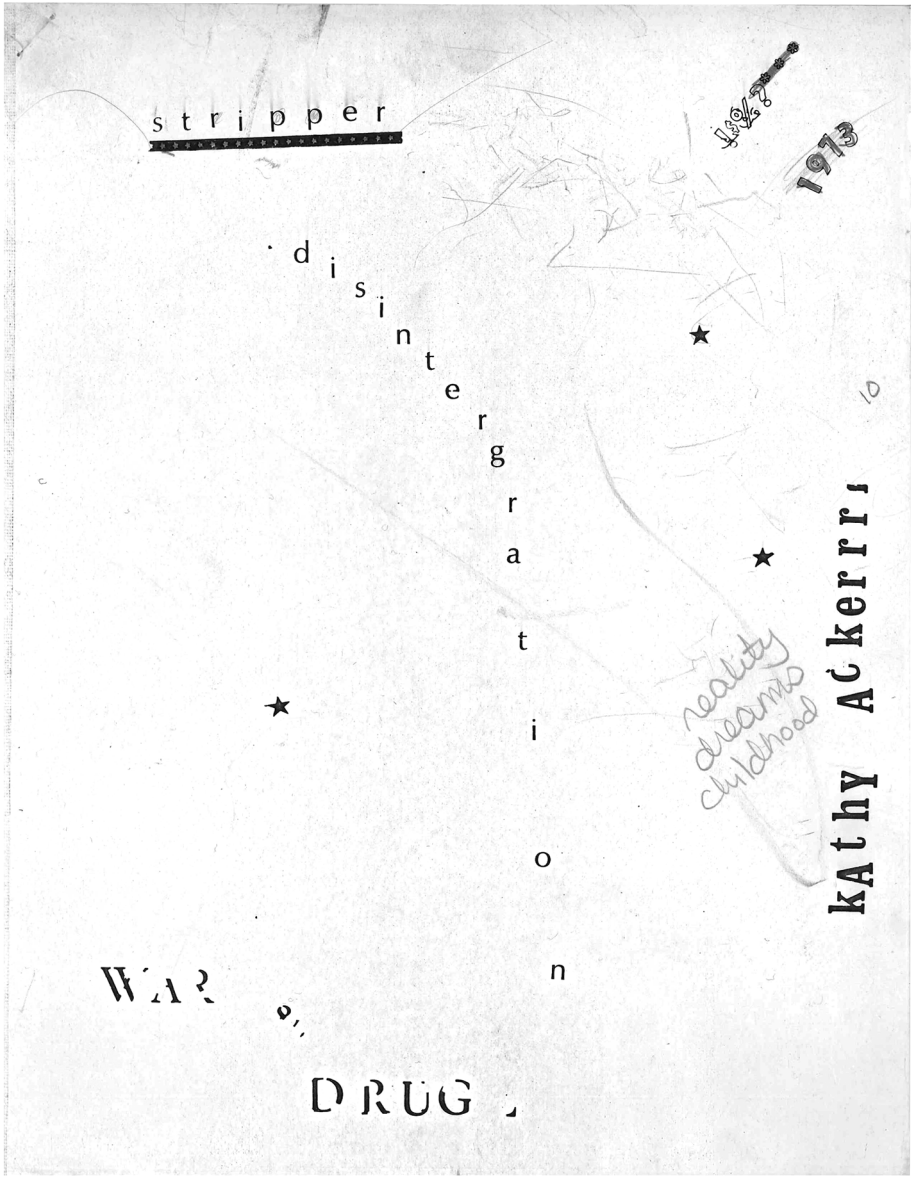
THE CONTINUING SAGA OF WAR AND DRUGS

PART 1 : STRIPPER DIS
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KATHY ACKER

1973

Two different title pages for Stripper Disintegration (reproduction by the Fales Library and Spec. Coll., Elmer Holmes Bobst Library).



THE CONTINUING SAGA OF
DRUGS AND WARS

stripper disintegration

Kathy Acker

3/73

[1b]
[1] THE BEGINNING OF THE DRUG DREAM:

as a child I [illegible] take two roads to the left a tall man walks
down the dirt pastures on either side sun shines straight down-
ward now I start on the other road untangle my mother an old
short thin grey-haired woman stands in the dark room livingroom
she moves around a satin embroidered chair next to a loveseat
curling wood handles sits in the loveseat we're in an antique store
would you like some tea the sun slants through the window blinds
I'm in a zoo run holding hands with my highschool friends past
monkeys I'm on an up completely happy I'm eating something
let's see the cats we race through the curving streets with the same
glee I'm sitting with the small old woman this is the other road
I play with each glass marble each marble is an eye white lines
from the insides of the pupils the lines arabesque into each other
swirl arches circles each marble is as large as my head I click my
thumb against my middle finger against the huge cat marble the
marble rolls into another marble the room is dark barely see olive
walls a card table half the size of the room I crawl under the card
table I'm an Indian yeah for the Indians 12:50 my stomach aches
I'm walking down the road past a farmhouse soldiers in olive
uniforms rush past me dead bodies lie in the woods blood drips
from the trees the farmhouse is a witch's house in Salem many
levels of wood roof three funny spires the sand is hot sharp tiny
rocks I walk up the old steps of the house white paint peels away
the land around me is flat chickens fields of corn and strawberries
I'm carrying a bag of fresh eggs a woman in an apron wisks me
indoors stupid a snake rears up inside the house is warm I enter a
[2b] square kitchen into the dining room and livingroom I wander up
three flights of stairs the next-to-top floor is a library I'm close to

the witch's den I have to find a book that contains all the secrets
I climb up thin ladders pour through old books the feeling is
mysterious I walk through a second hall into a small room where
the heads of two single beds meet in the corner I live in this room

(skip)

my sister's trying on clothes she takes off a yellow shirtwaist the
dress makes me look fat she puts on a satin two-colored 30's dress
flares out below the hips she looks better that's a beautiful dress I
try it on I look gorgeous I have on a black coat gloppy black boots
my mother admires me the dress is in terrible repair the zipper
in the back hardly works I notice there's no material covering my
right breast I also have to fix that zipper we're in a large cafeteria
by a nonexistent train station round green booths by the window
front of the cafeteria she's on T. V. I note the people in the booth
next to me two women two men I could care less T.V. I leave the
cafeteria walk past the window on the outside I go through a
small green door O I'm in the same cafeteria I'm looking for a job
I walk past the T.V. people surrepticiously want to attract them the
woman on the right is about 40 lots of curly brown hair it's Ultra
Violet she's taking white gook off her face she smiles at me then
winks well she smiled at me then winked I'm walking on a wide
dirt road open fields the sun's very hot I pass poor brown towns
I go into a house with three Chicano friends who I meet on the
road the house is light brown

[P A G E S M I S S I N G]

[6b?] ~~ecstatic~~ I bandage up fat people I'm in my parents' winter house I
fall asleep drunk on my parents' beds with a guy he's impotent I'm
in eleventh grade the next morning my father walks in what is the
meaning of this sir nothing happened a man a woman cannot be
together nude and nothing happens

I throw Acker's socks tie into the bathtub I persuade my father
he needs some whiskey he always needs whiskey Jack Daniels give
me all your money Acker sneaks out behind the door my father
puts his arms around me you're my darling I'll always love you I
respect you they don't respect you what the hell you talking about
I'll always take care of you my honeybun sweetie starts sobbing he
doesn't treat you properly I know you were here together in bed
that's a lie I'll always love my little girl hugs me closer get your
filthy hands off me no one treats you like I can do you fuck mo-
ther when people are our ages Kathy they no longer do that sort
of mother's 40 can you get it up my little girl you always come
home to me keep off me I'll never see you mommy again you
shove fucking wedding I just want you to know you're loved you
just want to rape creep can't even recognize your own lust keep off
I'm going to call mommy I could go to a hotel tonight have only
two dollars no friends can't lock my room tell your husband to
keep his hands off me play innocent I won't see you your mother
your friends again I go through this wedding shit for you sake sob
creep I'll speak to him I'm going into my room stay out it doesn't
matter if I see you nude I'm only your father I don't know who
my father is creep ~~my~~

[7b]
[vii]

[P A G E S M I S S I N G]

[1]
[IX]

make a movie about Marilyn Monroe picture of Marilyn tight
sheath white angel's hair on the back of a sofa two other people
with her one is one of the men making the movie the sky is un-
bearable light blue she rises into the sky turning red buildings she
swirls around again she's against the couch this is a portrait of
her early life she's in a ski resort or a town of ascending jumbling
streets she starts up on of the streets toward a cafe she's trying
to get rid of some man she tells another man she loves him he's
surprised pleased she doesn't know what she feels he wears a thin
red sweater his hands fold in his lap then ascend drink dark beer
Duke has to leave to drive

for Melvyn

I have to decide what segments of my life thought are interesting
to you phooey

I'm sitting on the ground a huge dirt field with Robin in front of
thousands of people a white platform we're the first to perform we
have to dance three of us go up on the platform we wait we still
haven't been named I step off the platform walk up a dirt road to
a large house or church I don't have to pay a fee to get inside the
windows are colored huge the ceiling is at a minimum thirty feet
high to my left ahead of me I walk up a double flight of stairs I
walk down a hall a doctor or a rabbi meets me at the bannister
below is the first room my death has come one of the dancers
[2] tells me Robin spoke well like a real one (rabbi) I have to read the
Hebrew then the English text in front of the congregation but I

can't read Hebrew the rabbi is standing in front of the door to his
bedroom talks to a doctor I walk into a large room I'm standing
on a red carpeted stage below me are thousands of people the
other girl leaves I start reading I guess how to pronounce the
Hebrew I can make no sense out of the English I stumble mutter
the next girl who arrives takes over the rabbi likes her because
she reads well talks privately to her phooey I'm with several other
people we all take acid I wander away by myself the other people
fuck each other I'm mad and jealous I have to become a stripper
I don't want to NO I have to get money can I work tomorrow I
want to live in another world I want to do what I want

I walk in the gardens with two friends ahead of us we see a large
black pool below the walk on which we're standing I've swum in
there (dirt) there are deeper water holes in the black we go down
to the grass around the water pass by the pool on a slightly lower
level see another pool smaller here are the deep holes the next
pool is rectangular swerves toward the left I can see the holes
finally on the lowest level we find the deepest water we go in
swimming a huge wave picks me up throws me against the bushes
which screen the highest walk I'm not hurt the next wave each
one bigger throws me against a pole no a rock another wave
rushes over the fence a wave hurls a car against two men who are
standing on the same ledge as me I try to hold back the car don't
have the strength there's a murder all those present go in front

[3]
[XI]

of the police I'm the only one questioned a window-door white
stucco in the midst of thick green foliage The Man has a list of
items in front of him one diamond lost each item indicates a
political enemy I just came to California (I'm a radical) I ask the
police questions about their questioning I feel responsible because
I helped push the car against the men no the man came out of a
small white house in the ledge someone murdered him from in-
side the house I leave the zoo in which there's the ponds with my
two friends we drive past huge animals in circus cages we go into
a house in the middle of a wood a mansion with tunnels different
levels someone is trying to murder me my woman friend revo-
lution she's been murdered I'm imprisoned on the top floor of the
mansion a cell-like room a short squat doctor enters takes out my
eyes destroys all my senses leaves I escape through a square hole
in the white wall over a balcony I see on the floor below a woman
with yellow hair who betrayed me rush to my room the same doc-
tor rushes up to her as she reaches the door destroys her senses
my friend rushes past me in a long white nightgown I mira-
culously reach the hall in the floor below the doctor is behind me
his hand reaches out a black gun my hand hits the gun turns it
toward the left toward him low click he falls to the floor I escape

all the animals in the world gather around me I put my hand on
their bellies I rub their nipples I rub the fur against black and
orange cunts I change their booze they bring dead birds to me

slowly we crunch the heads between our teeth then each red organ
the feathers are still warm smell good in a huge white stone
room hidden passages at all ends I'm at an orgy I leave with some
man we walk to the right turn right a narrow passage through a
hidden door I press a button a second door slides up someone's
in there we go into the opposite room I sit on the sidelines the [4]
satanists move down the center of the way their head is a woman
beautiful! yellow hair man's face smooth muscles I'm in love with
her she walks over to me I scared refuse she gets other people
from the sidelines to join her I want her to crush me in her arms
her people are trying to poison us I have to return home she lets
me fly away with two companions whose is she tricking me I fly
an inch over each tree almost touch the dirt up again how fast do
birds fly we try to follow highway 5 a car pulls around the nice
corner suburban neighborhood it's night no one to tell me what
to do force me I disintegrate I'm a criminal and pervert it doesn't
matter who I am anymore thousands of feelings every feeling pos-
sible there's a war on I'm on the good side I'm trapped in a huge
jeep-van with seven other people some of them are enemy spies
I have to figure out who are the good people one by one each
person dies only two people and myself are left there's a huge wire
cage in which brown dogs scream one of the men points a gun
at me I die I rise up he's dead I still don't know who's my enemy
at dusk I walk up a wide road cross a moat into a huge castle in
enemy territory these are dreams I don't have anything else to
write about call up to find how the cats are no answer war
and drugs

[5]
[XIII]

: all the proceeding's a mescaline dream time 2:43 place bed
Solana Beach the end of the world the police knock if you open
the door they'll kill you this is the only beauty a female tyra-
nosaur enters we've had complaints where's your kid we're going
to take your kid away what're you talking about cat shit in the
closet lewd dancing T.V. dinners in the icebox feed your kid cheap
easy nourishing you and your next time you come I'll have steaks
and lamb how many expensive toys does your kid have how many
pairs of shoes how many tailored dresses beat the tyranosaur up
take a kitchen knife stick it in the tyranosaur's guts kid wails the
garbagemen enter show us your birth certificate your licenses
don't move a step I ask Pam a romantic life! I sleep with all
the women in the world refill pen do you want to go to the bars
this is new take Leslie along no answer turn on the radio is Pam
going to appear will Peter be upset white car passes outside it's
not Pam ~~the star~~ truth is goal nothing else counts the simplicity
what's happened with Pam don't put down too close incredible
even the feelings the truth put down dream Sunday 3/4/73 I go
into my parent's summer house two-story wooden I take a woman
with me I want to sleep with her they'll never think we're lovers I
can sleep with women not with men my mother forbids me to live
in my and my sister's room in the room there's only one huge bed
we leave I go into my parents' house with another woman this
time I'm approved I can sleep with her I'm happy we walk upstairs
I want to find a room I go into my grandmother's room blue satin
cover over the bed cool air through her room on the other side
appears a door walk through to a small attic I see a couch with

a yellow cloth thrown over it big enough to hold two cushions
a small white captain's desk near the door a small cot to the left
diagonal the room's very crowded tiny here I can take my lover
make love whenever I want ~~all through the night~~ the furniture's
too small to sleep on put mattresses on the floor ask my mother
if I can live in the attic yes every night before you go to sleep
imagine Pauline repeat her name then masturbate what dreams
appear a mixture of opium acid sex everything else decays the
furniture falls apart waterbed sinks through the floor blankets
disintegrate small inflammations break out red diamonds spring
over my body I want something else use dreams fantasies any
halfass state to find I want to break through cross the oil spurt
with endings only care each event is true I want Pam to appear
want to kiss her neck again touch her heavy breasts I'm explo-
ding repressed how many times years I maniacal stomp towards
her touch her anywhere with anything everyone stares don't go
around fucking up Peter I want to hold her in my arms alone no
one else wake up my head against her breasts she moves to kiss
me I touch her stomach then her hair and cunt we look into each
other's eyes all night her lips become soft as I kiss them she tries
to warm me blahh

[6]

THE DEATH OF *THE* RICH PEOPLE

I'm only interested in putting down the truth Martha and Cybil make it in front of my bed talk about how much I live on I might be with my parents my mother calls there's a huge white spider on the Italian crackers I take down for Martha to eat I call mother she won't come I take down crackers from the kitchen shelf see white worms on the crackers finally a jelly-fish-like spider call my mother call my mother finally she comes gets rid of spider I'm in a fancy restaurant Acker's parents? I order desert a woman down the table from me orders apple pie I order creme de cocoa the waiter doesn't hear any coffee liqueur we don't have liqueurs what do you have a papaya drink what deserts apple pie some kind of cake I get the papaya drink and the cake I'm in the back yard on concrete after the meal I want to pass a board on the ground the board rests on something shivers a white pale snake appears on the ground warn me I shouldn't pass the board teach me the snake gets bigger bigger I don't pass the board scream for mother I go in elevator down to first lower floor I wait outside in pale green hall closed doors and corridors people make me work in a dress factory other people want to hurt me I ring on elevator bell a huge steel elevator appears inside a young darkhaired girl the operator is one of them they rush out from the doors walls again capture me doctors are going to stick shots in my arms send her down to the lower floor I land on a lower floor it's darker than above musty I walk down a hall to the left into an open glass door the walls are pale green three actors try out for a job it's the time of my terror the actors disguise themselves a young woman examines herself in the mirror there are gun-shots mirror shatters you have to find Doctor X the main evil one of these

[7]
[xv]

people could be Doctor X Doctor X is anywhere I walk downstairs
 through brown city streets at night city lamps past ruined wig
 stores I'm with the other actors in a huge pale room I lie under
 a pink blanket on a cot YMCA gun-shots from above rip through
 my body I'm dead I resurrect I have to find Zeus the Olympians
 are against me more and more terrified gradually the actors my
 friends are brainwashed into *my* enemies I walk down a street
 into an open cellar down a black ramp I know the enemy is here
 well my dear dogs run around in the room the Doctor appears
 so you've finally come my dear he shows me my former women
 friends now Olympian goddesses zombied they wear rich lace
 negligees a dog close to me has convulsions one of the women
 tells me there are wet dots in this cellar the dots congregate attack
 living creatures eat them they attack humans near the dead dog I
 see two clusters of dark air I move backwards complete fright es-
 cape from cellar meet a man who stretches upwards at least a mile
 he's my helper the final battle begins in white room somehow I
 kill the Doctor (Zeus) I still have to kill two gods and two female
 helpers I escape from the room the gods follow me my friend lifts
 me to the top of a roof they also climb over the roof they throw
 magic spears at me round disks I have sheets of newspaper to
 wind around my hands I throw the sticks back at them I'm slowly
 winning but their bodies are impervious to my hits they have no
 newspaper with which to protect themselves I hit one god again
 again he the last enemy dies

[8]

THE DEATH OF NIXON
THE GHOSTS BEGIN TO SPEAK

3/6/73 dream Pam Warren Peter play music in the park collect
money Pam brings along her girl friend her age long dark brown
hair I'm going to the zoo I watch two huge chimps fuck orangatang
throws turd shit drips from sheep's asses the parrots flow
over my head everywhere I'm miserable I become more more miserable
so you won't have to wait for me leave when you want to I
can take back a bus I'll pass by this spot to see if you're still here
I decide to get drunk sit in bar park Pam and her girlfriend enter
shit Warren Peter will be here soon I'm distant and charming I
control myself admirably girlfriend whispers to Pam do you want
to have dinner with us I loose cool Peter Warren enter we'll all
have dinner together after Pauline's meditation I sneak away leave
note for Peter I have to be alone sit in Melvin's back bedroom
there's a music department party after the meditation Melvin's
invited Melvin Jeffrey I go to bars can't get hold of Leslie Melvin
meets Polynesian boy he met at party party's busted by Nixonfuzz
O.K. your heads're being blown off it's about time! the dirge's over
should I call Pam she doesn't care for me anyway I live with a guy
another way drive myself kookoo at bar I meet Sherry touches me
Monday Night Lesbians I know she's gay she's too drunk rock
back forth back forth she only makes out with women she doesn't
sleep with them score my usual diamonds I might as well cut
out my clit donate aforementioned clit to strippers' union I'm
fucking up good better get back to work remembering work
makes me crazier you've got an overemotional senseless googoo
on your hands not my hands dear sweetheart/cruising time for the

[9]
[xvii]

ghosts again when I get busted Saturday I'll go to jail laughing
snow hangs around my thighs down the neck muscles into my
back

I'm in a newspaper office with Acker I look at an article about my
St. Mark's friends we smoke a cigarette with coke in it tobacco
hurts my throat I don't think I'm high we eat pure coke time
and space dim I'm happy I drift I think I'm high I'm wonderful
I'm working as a stripper I have to go from house to house I walk
up the steps of a large wood house no paint on the outside walls
night just begins let's have your records Dee and Ginger're with
me it's already 10:00 we were supposed to start at 8:00 Acker
delays driving us to the house he wants to down the coke I'm in
the bathroom I forget to bring my black makeup case go into the
dressingroom can I borrow your make-up Ginger has only eye
make-up one stick of purple two different sticks of blue a brush I
borrow the purple one blue mascara the old woman who think's
she's the manager but is just a toady tells me I'm fired why're you
firing me I haven't done your work you're slack I didn't insult your
baby you have a beautiful baby she carries a fat blonde kid a few
months old looks like a suburban male creep I'm going to call
Big Jim I'll talk to him I realize she wants me to quit for my own
good she and Lynn Lonidier who used to be a stripper're talking
together they both go crazy old grey stockings fall down her legs
huge hole at the top of one she used to act like a whore get your

[10]

records out my Mingus' record lasts for 30 minutes 56 seconds
(I only have to dance 15 minute sets) I have to find other records
the dreams today are lousy Pauline's meddling in them she's not
sure what she's doing power crap voodoo reality everyone with
her's freaking out Bonnie cries I put my hand over Pam's cunt
5:00 stroke her she holds me kiss her ear my hand moves back
and forth she begins to move her body faster faster she comes we
hold each other ~~erase~~ I see a woods a woodbarrel in the woods
I zoom in like camera men are chopping up Charlie Buel's body in
the barrel I don't eat or sleep for four days I don't sleep with men
I prefer not to fall in love with straight women I get burned I'm
fucked up for a year I'm very calm never get upset

THE END OF CHAOS

BEGINNING OF SINGLE STRUCTURE 1973

DESIRE BUT ANARCHISM NOT BEAUTY DRAGDRONE

OF CHAOS STILL CHAOS I AM CHAOS

at least I've got a sense of humor about all this shit romanticism
diamonds I dress only in fur I enter as RipRed East

I make war for the sake of war 1973 aesthetic bluh diamonds
(awake only at night who do I want to sleep with last two days
love Peter he's going to leave me I treat him like shit (bluh) he
eats me we fuck I come five times I have to get rid of the cats
allergy don't think about that but how interesting are you I have
a new relation to nonexistent readers hatred Peter's cock swings
around he buys a long black wig down to his waist to go in drag
leather-out)
again it's night

[?a]

this is it baby for you for me for Peter why'm I doing this too late
the stars fall into our hands I'm in New York in a sleazy nightclub
Charlie Hayden Ornette Coleman etc. play they're my accompa-
niment we're at the Met huge white stage high above the people
I don't want to go on I miss dancing right next to the audience
I go outside see the black guys that show at the club hey Target
let's get this place real so we can play move chairs on floor clear
space in middle of people I tell the guys backstage we can fuck
the stage everyone digs me I'm walking down the street with
Wanda I live with her we're returning from the market high on
acid some Mexican guy's beating up a girl it's a Sunday night cold
rainy a woman's chasing us old she takes tiny little steps her eyes
are white huge she throws a knife at us we race up the street the

[3a]
[XXI]

end of the world dance to Ornette Mingus Liberation Music
~~Orchestra~~ *Arkestra* five joints two beers forget codeine it's none of
our business when I turn 21 I'm going to work at the bars none
of this theatre shit I'm going to make myself a fortune they like
cute flirty girls I'll just wiggle my butt a little wiggle wiggle o I can
get the money this is how you do it lick Willy's neck I can't bring
the codeine because of supposed bust can't bear being this tired
do you care about sex no can't think of anything else to talk about
dreams Ornette Coleman Carla Bley a tall red-haired woman jeans
laugh I dream all night the end of the world wake up to remember
dream back to before end give Bree and Ben donuts why don't
you like me actually I don't care a double life I'm in a house
among dark green leaves leave Peter for Alfred Hitchcock Alfred
believes a man and a woman in true love are one person

a dead brown kitten gray feathers the head is joined to the body
by a red string in the middle of the feathers a vertical streak of
red a few gray feathers lie on the carpet the body dangles the
feathers part two oval red shapes CRUNCH more of the oval red
shapes show the children sniff step on a small grey foot the red
globes hang outside a few feathers some bones only one red globe
remains and a tiny red dot some of the smell is gone as I flip
out begin to remember I can feel dancing-robot ride in car when

you die only the consciousness goes eat sandwich salad or take
 along hungry while dancing I'm anxious back to nine years ago
 scared about what not that time myself watch time fear of being
 late Yvonne tries to stick a knife through my back misses
 slashes my arm as I twist back her a arm no one helps me (I'm
 naked) I manage to drag her over to Willy tell Willy to call Peter
 Morgan comes into the dressing room I'm trying to improvise a
 tourniquet why'd she knife you I've never done anything to her
 call in other women for proof I don't speak to her why don't you
 help me blood drips over arm to floor instead of trying to find
 out how I'm supposedly guilty what does it matter who I fuck if I
 don't do it here you're a lousy homosexual I fuck 10 foot alliga-
 tors you're just scared what you are you're hating yourself through
 me (~~sentimental shit~~) I wouldn't work for you again can't get on
 schedule get knifed the whole night snore

[4a]

we got to get some money I'm going to start doing it all tape
 Marianna in Los Angeles there's an all-woman rodeo this friend
 of Carol Becker's coming here Thursday who's a whore I'm going
 out to the bars with her she might not talk I tell women's lib's
 people I'm a stripper bluuu Rich is dating this girl who's Harlan
 Ellison's mistress he went away for a week I don't fuck anymore
 she gets \$200. a week to rub his back he's impotent I could do

the same all these Picassos we'd be invincible do I think Peter's a child or a man if his mother stays in Los Angeles he's a man she comes down here to hold his hand hello Kathy here's Peter all her friends stop by to give him presents what do I get mixed up in these fucking scenes for (stick to women) guilt hello who are you I'm dying along with Laos my body's placing itself on a black stone a band of violets around my cunt no I don't mind stripping what the fuck am I doing here education rich parents be ready to do anything anywhere I hitch up and down 101 two laborers who are broke no one tries to rape me one guy raises grey-hounds blow all my money I'm sick and broke nightmare I write my parents with hope future money evil capitulation I can't keep on stripping for the rest of my life most turn twenty-five five kids three ex-husbands live on Welfare whine all the time at thirty are huge hit their kids across the mouth are junky-whores I'll interview them they're really smart I've got to get out of here my head spins I can't think a huge black vulture walks in the door the world is perishing three thousand Martians land on Empire State six thousand near poison army base

[5a]
[XXIII]

work as a stripper the walls close in no I can do whatever I want this night everything is chaos I get off the bus fish is ready Melvin calls 12:00 scratch Pickle Paul's nipple we eat donuts leave

go to the bank because we don't have any checks printing shop
optometrists get my glasses adjusted straight shits refuse to help
me shines fuck Bree buy headband wigs don't look good I want a
white wig hair down to my ass you can go in drag half the people
are in drag half aren't get back in the green car Rich Norma
Warren call I eat corn chips donuts play recorder turn on heat
turn heat down Kotex I live on an island there are many levels of
houses the bottom is sand water laps I'm at an orgy I climb from
level to level by a hanging ladder a stupid woman Corinne is in
the university I want the easy money I have all A's super recom-
mendations I work as janitor everything is chaos all I think about
is sex off the job the excitement is necessary when I'm horny
I begin to worry about myself and dislike myself Americans are
sex-crazy (no knowledge) I dream sleep with specific women
there's going to be a gay dance shun knowledge in the morning
Pickle Paul sleeps the machinegun and all available rifles join
in make way for the morning light! at 2:40 jazz and rock an orgy
begin she comes to me grabs my breasts uh=huh I reach for her
she turns to talk to someone else I'm two hours on a bed with
her she doesn't want my passion kiss plah! like we're half asleep!
I made you all wet she puts on her clothes walks away nowadays I
kick those shits (Barnetts) out of my house I'm spaced out
war and drugs

[6a]

STRIPPER'S CHAOS DIRGE

body not here who cares what the fuck they want orange! one
finger two fingers move ankle to cunt San Diego enters my body
the Navy blows up! indite Nixon for blowing up three arsenals
one tank ten ships the sailors flee enter the pink car we drive
through Los Angeles Oregon here's the pink car they're all dead
let's see your license I could take you to jail it's not my fault it's
not my fault where are the cats now I feel powerless I'm not able
to control myself murderer pervert what do you do I go to school
what year graduate student do you plan to continue sick of the
whole system I like what I'm doing zoom what do you do I dream
I'm a good-for-nothing shows go over badly tonight I don't have
any hair I'm not a real female give me a double dildo I dance
slow slower Bree kisses Ginger I kiss Bree and Kathy Kat Cybil
takes my phone number bunch of drivel diary turd but still the
truth I need a good luck charm ward off evil demons stomach
aches from codeine I pass out on stage end up in some guy's lap
they don't rape women down here only girls this is pig paradise
you can't get a screw if you try in retaliation Peter cries I won't
give you my car I don't give a fuck if you lay out in the grass all
night arrested twice don't bother me I'm perfect I want my cats
I tell Kim Ginger's going to move in to the new house can I fuck
her I'm going to fuck her Ginger thinks I'm serious I don't go
after women that way I wouldn't pass up the opportunity this is
a bust I'm frightened take off your clothes bend over face to the
ground where's your take this gun goes off you'd better do what
I say now you'll learn I can do anything I want the narration
of the ghosts is dying america death blow up everything each

[7a]
[XXV]

building San Diego diamond gas and light building three block
cop complex the whole of everything

fuck all audiences you readers hearers snuffle snotasses hate you
I do what I want to strange writhing shit get that lousy jazz off
the stage do you want her do you want her to come sit on your
head piss over your green cocks no fuck off do you want smear it
your asses what other shit can I do two years graduate school
fits you for this replica of Rockefeller beep-beep I'm going to
dance to nothing but jazz Elliot Crap-cart bee-eep--schliepeel-li-loo
ignore everyone when I start managing here everyone laughs at [8a]
me you got to keep repeating it fuck you I have diamonds inside
my cunt my cunt's going to poison you take your arms wrap your
intestines into a straight jacket set fire to your hair stick knives
into your blood vessels red white blue spurts this is more excit-
ing than New York every hippy is like us hippies a woman has
long hair various colors doesn't do anything gross or strange
loves tease men have them do things for her I'm in drag I'm
a creature from the third planet Jigoplex everything is double
everyone is I can wake up in either paradise or Jigoplex (hell)
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 past 0 it's Jigoplex or LSD I'm com-
pletely evil the worst smell in the world EVIL pour coke over his
head Harris is dead I didn't kill him I have to get rid of his

body or the police will think I killed him we cut off his head and
arms we have to hide the blood we bury him in an underground
stream of air he lies face down in the snow no one will ever find
him hey you want to be in Penthouse I'm getting my rocks
off you can only meet this slick creep if I say so you don't have
to fuck to get into they only want untrained chicks I almost
get in at 5:00 in the morning Marsha Ginger Bree Joyce the
phone rings O.K. I don't know I'm their pawn stars shoot out
of rotting corpses diamonds swirl round my body I have a million
jobs do them all effortlessly perfectly I have tons of money I dance
write whenever I want destroy

fourth day

the wanderers in chaos meet evil

smoke one joint two joints I'm riding to another place vomit in
the bathroom only time left to write have to write down dreams

[9a]
[XXVII] death I'm making love with a woman my age we hold each other's
hand thighs next to thigh my mouth touches her mouth long
brown hair I get into my pink car I don't know how to drive I'm
on a two-lane road a highway? ahead two roads run into one the
road turns sharp to the right I head into the bushes I have to
swerve around the car-ahead-of-me-to-my-left swerve around the
car-on-my-right I make the sharp turn my doors keep opening I

drive past Cardiff up a narrow gravel road to a College old stone
buildings in the midst of green woods hills dip up down I'm on
a bicycle I'm leaving school on the stone road I don't know how
to bicycle my sister's with me knit a pink and brown sweater the
car keeps becoming a bicycle it's already night there's no more
day we've been paddling for hours past Cardiff finally we reach
New York just past midnight everyone I know is furious at me
we drove 500 miles I didn't know we could do it brown brick
buildings I'm pacifying my mother and father diamonds cover our
naked bodies we dance nine shows drop down dead you'd better
be alive tomorrow O Ronny please I'm soo tired I can't work
tomorrow I'll fuck you tell you you're God I like to first ski then
ball third read fourth dance I'm going to vomit the sun comes out
sneaks into the center of my head energy! Robin's vomit is yellow
you're a whore and a slut I might dance nude on the stage I'm
not in your category vomit get your shit together hi momma
bitch grab for each other tear clothes skin to bits yellow hair over
the floor I live in another world I get you a bead necklace
tiny red and green dots ankh ring for good luck I lie on the floor
dead San Diego pukes over me the dancers leave their hair as
shrouds romantic elegy by stripper ~~kill kill kill kill KILL!~~

[11a]
[XXIX]

kill a cop for fun

A SHORT NARRATION OF WAR AND DRUGS

this is a narration ha ha the end of the world the end of the
world after after the after who after all the world is you I do an
after suck my ass Peter gets home Pam hasn't called cop cars
disappeared what do you dream about read masturbate the desert
appears bodies stretch out upon if we enter the cubical giant city
huge blocks move apart at the center don't you understand you're
on acid the blocks tumble over each other constant change
as we leave the city a gorge valley climb up rocks tiny ledges
impossible passes red purple birds skwawk craww the world ends
begins three times I get it all together I'm coming down I live
among humans I'm in myself can't get out people press upon
each other cause each other to change I'm meshed up with every
being only emotions matter fuck the trip I'm too fucked up to
tell if I'm really sick get to sleep I'll see Pam tomorrow aloud
allowed go cruising this is garbage I'm too tired Ben makes
it with every dame he can he caresses Joyce in front of my face
he expects me to not make him feel guilty sleep with whatever
woman he brings home I'm supposed to be getting interested in
sleeping with women I'm too sensitive shouldn't plague him with
my problems men like young girls I study my pictures when I
was 17 through 21 learn how to model my face I look as young as
possible I look younger now than I did when I was 20 I'm lucky
I have oily skin this job keeps my body in shape I'm too old to
learn to love women I'd have to make too many changes piss in
the toilet I don't want to work in this place too sleazy there's no
less repulsive place to dance I should be working (5) more days a
week you figure it out all I want is to make love to you

we're the ghosts of Solana Beach we come to you from Grecian [12a]
depths of insanity from the hollows of Africavoodoo exotic means
eastern anything means shit moreover I don't no more have no
job we're interested in being rich because there's absolutely no
possibility we'll ever be anything but bums we wouldn't know how
to be materialistic Lenin wakes up says he's around goes back to
sleep drunk let me talk to Peter let me talk to Peter I'm not paid
to be your fucking toady we (the ghosts) take out our knives Pam
sleeps with me! I can be nauseously sentimental! erase the
ghosts are peeing everything's fucked do they read the books I tell
them the plots and meanings do they give a shit no 9:30 tonight I
don't want to talk to you I'm depressed you want attention I don't
wan't to apologize what the hell I'm trapped here take out Sun Ra
album leave twenty disastrous years go by O dear our first fight
will our true marriage survive the only thing which comes through
is fuck the political part O I wanted to warn you girls I know
more than anyone there's going to be a bust I took acid Monday
then Friday Saturday Saturday was wonderful I saw yellow trees
everything was yellow mist endless water against the sky incredibly
mellow emotions aren't that important how fast can I alienate you
that assumes I have friends I might as well write as much as pos-
sible black poets find the golden spirit I can't think of any stories
to put down I'm scared to sleep with a woman I fall in love with

two straight women I make out with them they refuse to sleep
with me one year I want to sleep with a woman straightforward
feeling I fall in love with a gay woman am I gay or straight I make
out with her not now sleeping with her bad mood 2:43 P.A.M.

[13a] MY CHILDHOOD: *for Warren:*
[XXXI]

I'm a frigid bitch who hates to work aren't you glad you live with
me I'm glad I live with anyone (my mother) how's the weather
I'm moving to San Francisco how's the weather are you dying of
a heart attack I love you how's the weather I'm the night-time
secretary I stuff the ghosts dead teachers into the trumpets of
angels bodies shoot out all over the U.S. it's Vietnam retaliating
the phone freaks instal cancer into all the computers we send out
bombs against the Vietnamese nothing explodes the end of the
war anything can work through memory strangers walk into my
office I don't see them because I'm blind through the windows I
see Peter David (Antin) make love mmmm I'm going to become
Secretary of Music I'll give anyone who says it's magician wings
they have to make love to me provide snakes for my pet bats I'm
always sick I have arthritis rheumatism the three times I've been
closest to death I haven't been scared of dying if I die I won't
know about it that's strange Peter's talking to the car tell the car

he'll give her (him) a bath don't worry I go to an all male Catholic military school after gym class I'm in the shower seven older boys enter the shower they rape me I'm prejudiced against fags I hand out posters pro free love a priest calls me my two friends into his office when my first friend comes out she looks shocked a black car passes by the priest tells me physical love is forbidden he gets hornier and hornier he can't control himself he puts his hand on my shoulder why are you for free love Peter doesn't sleep with men at this moment rips my shirt apart I run out of his office I get freaked out thinking about this these stories explain my childhood I can't stay madly in love for more than a week I want to see Pam the angels hover above my childhood freakout I

QUEENS OF THE DARKEST NIGHT:
MY CHILDHOOD:

how long's my cock 10 inches 12 inches I can make any woman expand they don't want to fuck me their cunt muscles get tight infections they never want to fuck again homosexuals are sick the problem with women is they're not straightforward my cunt's silver and gold I feel terrific gook's flowing out of my nose a white ambulance passes us on the road Peter's lying on the bed he lifts his head hand scratches beard I realize he's not dead the nurse

[14a]

adjusts his head still I can't tell if the headlights I see are real
 imaginary keep driving hamburger men zoom out in front of my
 eyes Peter gets some peyote even though I'm the most famous
 artist in America the UCSD art department refuses to hire me
 because I'm a teacher's wife I'm more famous than the teachers are
 I teach for more years don't get near her she's a viper I write them
 a horrendous letter denounce Nixon they're all Nixon Harold the
 Fuck sends out subterranean letters to all the deans of the school
 my husband's insane because I'm pushing myself try to get a job
 I refuse to use their mimeo machine I don't want to do anything
 with anyone I adore Peter but I go crazy about women I don't
 like repressing myself then going nuts follow some woman madly
 around everyone stares at me women are cunts they ought to get
 fucked as much as possible their main function is fuck they get
 confused get away from realizing their identity let's see your cuntie
 let's see your titties I'm not really sexist I'm scared to death I un-
 derstand your real nature I know what you want either you're sick
 you hate me you should see a psychiatrist I love you more than
 I love anyone else I never love anyone until I love you I'm going
 to kill myself I live in a house with a company of murderers. I
 flee from the house into the black a gang of men chase after me
 to rape murder me we race down a wide paved street hear their
 footsteps pirates one hatchet hits me I turn doesn't go through
 my skin next hatchet glances through my leg two more hatchets I
 barely bleed one pirate takes out short gun shoots bam bam bam
 I die

[15a]

[XXXIII]

[P A G E S M I S S I N G]

want Pickle Paul Pickle Paul back don't want him to go away he's [19]
a person a spirit inside I see him green orange curled up totally
happy I want him no animal Lizard and Agatha I'm blank I'm
hysterical I can't keep his picture in my mind he's gone get rid
of everything I think of another animal ha puke no answer
take a walk on the beach he's all curled up nose snuffles against
paw he walks on the yard stake territory Paul the stud he grows
another cock I hold the knife high in the air he's on the ground
somersaults on his back Pickle Paul Pickle Paul he digs newspaper
crackles he's back is that Pickle Paul Pickle Paul's gone he's gone
get that through your head NO NOOOOO NOOOOOOOO
I want Pickle Paul he runs away from these nice people two times
stands silent in the corner as we give him back this is food I'm
in an olive wood I run down a hill with rifles in my arms I hand
out the rifles take charge it happens only at night we dive into
tiny holes and into trees the enemy approaches from behind us
a farmer shoves his pitchfork into my craw bats leap in our hair
I'm alone the army's disappearing behind a hill I roll on the dirt
through mud the end of my feelings there's no more rice no more
food we're starving I don't care we watch everyone else starve we
play with each other roll down hills yeh oh yeh in one respect
after midnight I sneak to the door of their room she's crazy she
doesn't do anything she's supposed to do they plan to kill me
throw me in a ditch they're nice people yeh refuse to give me any
money so I go away tell me I'm evil I am I'm a murderer I kill
Nixon.

[P A G E S M I S S I N G]

[44] DREAM: PRIVATE:

I can't move my bones are paralysed to the sheets my muscles
twist the blankets take something away the dream takes
the dream away from me I become an eagle a large white bird
above the ocean whitecaps break on whitecaps don't think about it
I soar into a hole on a rocky ledge high my white belly itches my
beak moves down toward the rock I'm returning home I soar over
high mountains thousands of pine trees I don't want to return
I'm sorry I could let your friends I call up Laura give her hell she's
with her boyfriend I'm her boyfriend I don't want you to come I'm
being dull return to my cramps like being on acid I'm too delicate
right now too many emotions get involved with someone your
own age I can't be bisexual anymore I have to be gay or straight
I can't eternally repress myself because I can't it's all very simple
I'm going to be living basically in a gay world Morgan Rockefellers
fungus cohorts are destroying all worlds erase a giant keeps trying
to destroy the world Event A happens I'm in a hospital run up
down wide green stairs the giant kicks his foot the hospital slides
into ruin another set of events I walk over solid ground in a
park the giant's foot kicks up out of the earth cause an eruption
I escape I'm on a bus the giant's following me I don't want to face
the shock Pam isn't going to sleep with me most people present
explanations of their lives you blurt out your life I'm a freak I live
with freaks etc. so Pam isn't going to sleep with me I like Pam I'm
withdrawing I never think you'd be interested hmmm life's hard it
isn't easy being lesbian things never work out I don't know how
[45] to apologize puke let's have some violent emotion please world-
overturning love adoration extasy at least a night in bed I deserve

everything this is my marriage this is the night of all marriages
I sleep during the day I believe in continuous revolution kill all
pigs decadence 1973 blahh I like Pam a lot

[P A G E S M I S S I N G]

[53] Jeffrey's going crazy he's only happy when he takes acid sometimes he's depressed then falls into gigantic depression he's nothing if he's not Nixon and he's not Nixon he's not even superman he talks all the time an hour without stopping I don't care what you do I work hard at it I've got a good relation with my parents I deserve take all their money I'm leaving San Diego Carol's leaving I'm leaving school I don't have anything to hold on to I stay in San Francisco few months find a job if I can't back to San Diego no one can find a job in a few months five tabs of windowpane I'm going to New York get out of here that all of our advice get out of here while your brain still functions that's carrot juice once a month in the life of every woman a little carrot juice runs down her legs when it happens to you you'll understand too late sweetheart I know all about sex my husband's cock is too small too wide he doesn't fuck enough haw haw dear husband why don't you get some brains why don't you fuck me more he doesn't give me enough money so I'm going to take your allowances I'll give them back to you are you pregnant I'll always be here to give you an abortion there are three roads my childhood dreams the truth *garbage* everything go on on infinities of desire how can I teach you to hate yourself how can I teach you to hate and love me you're a jigoplex myth you twirl form my snake brains you stick yourself into every cell of my cunt blah blah this is terrific I'm father's wonderful I lie like a child I smother myself in become white satin silks from leaping camels warm velvets like imaginary huge cats

[UNSORTED PAGES]

[1] STRIPPER PORNOGRAPHY

feel sorry for myself three years strip before men open cunt try
wherever I am to blow people's minds bodies change myself I'm
sick my lungs about to give out am I going to die sex has become
this I prefer to be alone sit in bed here cats around me sleeping
get books read note down and I'm sick again anything so that the
truth comes through glory and the angels

- [3] I can't go on smile give energy to sailors business bluuhhh get the fuck out how does this look not doubled the way before get another job if I had any options out I'd take them I can't talk now I'll support you I could waitress wash laundry dishes \$2.00 an hour don't don't work tomorrow what else am I doing with my head snap fingers I'm sick it's in my head people get cured clap Harris is coming to visit me I can sleep with him and Peter without hurting Peter's feelings I sneak out of the room a stone hall a monastery I'm a guy up stone stairs to a tiny room Harris has left to my right white light flows downwards through a large window I'm trying to catch up to Harris a beach (the afternoon) I walk fast through a tunnel on the beach no roof white light walls sand there are many tunnels I climb up waist high rock out through a door another tunnel I'm a movie star nineteen year old blonde hair horn blows superstar put on red nail polish fingers burn Kathy Kat seems upset she's high on something

[4] if you don't suck my cock you won't keep the job bluuhhh you missed mime last chance of success no chance exists I get taken off schedule I can't get on schedule am I fired being slowly screwed between my breasts I'll lie to you anytime should I change jobs wait it out I won't have enough money don't miss work can't go cruising see T. Riley concert no chance for I don't have any mind no I don't have any body my body's off somewhere I control it leap pirouette twirls through space I become the beat then I can move opposite to the beat I make my own time but whenever I want can return you can't have this job anymore more money work in Oceanside tiny stage can't get it on I don't know I don't do anything anymore hate everyone are you drunk again I dream about being in New York I'm walking down second avenue between fifth and fourth I go into a clothes store a rack of llama panchos a rack of white embroidered dresses these are beautiful I can find anything I want my lungs disintegrate I watch the stone of the buildings each piece of sand separate from every other piece of sand the buildings crumble up foetuses fire bursts out from the tops stars shoot up from the sidewalks spires swirls of green light surround the heads I don't have any money can always get some get a huge Scotch poodle greyhound bites everyone but Peter and me I can walk anywhere only five more years to live 10 more years constant explosions don't diminish increase I have to get out of here San Francisco no we'll go to Rome I'm sick of starving it doesn't really fit if I wear my ankhs I'm O. K. I won't keep fucking up

time of rest over use of mind of angels I have to go back to work [6]
again cajole friends for rides dance to jazz I don't give a shit
anything to help boredom entertain (blow mind) myself if not
others I have to adjust again make mind duller separate love for
body BLAH DISGUST how else do you earn a living drop-out
no more books mind flitters about freaks out what're you writing
for keep sensitive all disintegrating parts in touch cut off a limb
the decease of the world is it maniac vibrations catch on strains
of disease you're a masochist you make events more trouble for
yourself than they need be how am I going to eat sleep dreams
again concern dancing the dancers every part of me infiltrate
calm down I'm O.K. I write about where I am that beauty good
basically I have to be aggressive destroy writing new kind I relax
there stop until energy's overpowering desire I'm walking
again down second avenue below eighth street I just got here I
belong here I walk past an old dress store into the store llama fur
bags hang on nail at the height of my eyes a rack of fur pan-
chos in the center of the store I see a higher rack of short white
dresses the usual foreign kind only these are beautiful I can buy
whatever I want I walk around the brown corner into an antique
store a long blue feather hangs in the window carved wood desk
crocheted black dress I want a hat a warm fur hat

[10] I take acid with several people I leave the people wander by myself
the other people are fucking each other Peter ~~the guy I live with~~
who has brown hair Bree and Ben fade in and out when I find
out I'm very jealous I stand by the moving bed I tell Bree I saw
her and Ben in an orgy I was in an orgy my hair rubs against
Ben's black hair heads move his tongue touches my lips I move
my tongue against his tongue have to give my show do you want
to sleep with Bree I like Bree a lot Bree and I have slept with
other women she seems to like it though she hasn't really gotten
into it I was butch for awhile I try to touch Bree make her
touch me want to sleep with Bree I sleep with Bree passion go to
work Tuesday five days in a row cough run temperature Bree says
she's going to work Tuesday Peter run get some orange juice for
Bree Bree isn't working I leave books for her she isn't working
because she's angry at me I want to sleep with Ben I'm getting
involved with another woman who can't understand why I act
so emotionally about her dream I sleep twelve hours a day I'm
perfectly healthy all sexual contact mellow begins smoothly easily
too much codeine our people and they're going to clash there's
going to be a fight I want it to happen you must be in love with
Bree Peter I need evidence blowout flare fire spurts from the
houses a dream I want to happen she has light brown hair dark
brown hips as wide as mine rosy cheeks blue eyes taller than me
perhaps thinner

the destruction of all cats

[?]

scream hard shout for two years cats are the only other beings
in the world besides me their soft bodies curl into my stomach
their paws open and close around my eyes they red birds so
I have food to eat I take a knife stick it into their stomach I rip
out green intestines I shove their bodies into holes I talk them
over the telephone day of rest I have to get out of bed perform
jesus christ I fly around this pink car from tree to tree black leaves
against black the water runs clear over the rocks I'm asleep high
on pot codeine every hour I have to wake up walk up on this stage
dance completely unbelievable the shits who work in buildings are
dead men they're instructed what to do more instructions! more
instructions! the cats are dead on the top of emptiness red
bells Peter's finger the vision's beginning as I keep riding around
it's just that it keeps getting harder and harder more dope now
the cats are sniffing around white walls freak out their minds
Pickle Paul rubs against strange legs the only people around I call
him and he comes to me Lizzy and Aglump eat liverwurst purr
rrpurrr sniff Lizard licks Aggy I stroke my self there's no more
light no I'm invisible I call out my wishes Che Guevara and drugs
what else do you do the wind's cold around my ears and toes until
I start dancing I writhe close to the ground shoot outward frigh-
tened leap into the air

[10] this is all I've got I don't get out of bed turn off the phone I don't want anyone else the trees are around the ground where's the night I'm not hungry we don't want have to call Sybil I'm not operating from this holocaust we wander to Mexico too much experience too much thinking I can't think anymore see green eyes hood eyes get the codeine out of the car it's not a bust a bust's going to happen any day be careful when you walk into the club single file joints disappear the Vice refuse to leave this is shit war and drugs war and drugs I'm not able to move I'm not able to think O.K. black curls over the red door I don't talk to Martha cause I feel guilty about Lenny's having left her have to fuck a few people get out of this wretched house! I fly an inch above each tree at times almost hit the ground we follow highway 5 how fast do birds fly the evil orgiasts are against me a beautiful woman carved hard face leads their procession

I'm sitting on a forest bank slope toward water with a guy I'm living with my age his mother dies he starts flipping out a doctor drugs him up care for him (Acker?) we travel in a plane with our new dog we walk into our new apartment a light brown room large bed the doctor tells me to come see him I sense why I'm working as a whore a secretary I go to the doctor's apartment I'm sitting on a leather doctor's chair in front of a large desk behind the desk the doctor sits places a large silvercover folder on the desk inside dates correspond to places in France tiny black print I want you to go there I see buildings the insides of yellow offices where I work I don't have a cent forget about that I fall in love with the doctor he's older than me I walk back into the apartment I see that Acker's really flipping out he needs more drugs I leave worry return he's making spirals with a pencil on lined paper look closer he's marking up my notebook Elly's sick or crazy can't do the big reading at UCSD I'll get the reading need Melvin's say-so no you don't write enough aren't reliable I write more than you turd break off our friendship I'm nauseous he's flipped out I grab for my notebook fight he reaches into a black bag operator 755-2359 755-2359 pulls out a gun I shield myself with a mattress the bullet doesn't hit me play dead he begins to sob over me [illegible]

[25]

[28] I'm made up of diamonds I'm nauseous I'm at war with myself
and everyone else good make war more worship my clit I'm
insane good now traitors are gods the rebels of the people we're
going to Cuba Chili India Iran inside coming 12:00 white hair

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The text reproduced here is a 66-page typescript, archived at the New York University Fales Library & Special Collections, in the Kathy Acker Notebooks, Mss 434 – Box 3 – Folder 3 – *Stripper Disintegration: Drugs and War*.

It features 6 different typed title pages, each with a different design (cf. supra, the images of two of them). One of them bears the date “2/73”, another “3/73”. We dated the work “2-3/73”.

The text presented here is composed in fragments, and the order of the pages is hypothetical. In the folder are five sets of pages, each with a different pagination and two different fonts. Within each of the sets, pages are obviously missing.

Paginations used: 1) is in Arabic numerals followed by letter “b”, it goes from 1b to 2b and then only 7b is extant; 2) is in Arabic numerals without any roman letter, starting from 1 going to 10, 19, 44-45, 53; 3) is in Arabic numerals followed by letter “a”, starting with [?]a (the number can’t be read), 2a-9a, 11a-15a; 4) is in odd roman numerals and runs asides the other paginations on every two-sheets, on the top right corner of the pages’ recto, it runs like this I, VII, IX, XI, XIII, XV, XVII, XXI, XXIII, XXV, XXVII, XXIX, XXXI, XXIII; 5) is in Arabic numerals without any roman letter like 2), these pages seem to be other versions of pages bearing the pagination 3), they have been all gathered at the end under the title “[Unsorted Pages]”.

We tried to follow here as much as possible the pagination from typescript #4, as it is the only one that has sections that overlap with all of the other versions, and could therefore be the most recent version represented here.

Acker’s handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to the typescript’s original pagination when legible.

This text was already, and only partly, transcribed and published by Lizzie Borden. We attempted here to correct the transcription errors in her version, as well as to propose an alternative page order.

The text would have been composed between February and March 1973 in Solana Beach. Even if it was intended as a “1st part” only, it is still likely that the text was never finished.

Notes:

284 **STRIPPER** In her interview with Andrea Juno and V. Vale for *Angry Women* (1991), Acker gave a lengthy testimony about her working in a strip club in San Diego. In the end she seems to be talking about this text, *Stripper Disintegration*.

When I was in San Diego I worked as a stripper. There were these three clubs in San Diego, and you went around in this pink Cadillac from club to club. They’re burlesque clubs, you do your act, and you don’t have to serve drinks or talk to customers. You would dance, get off stage and into the pink Cadillac, and be driven to the next club;

you would go around and around all night. So you'd spend all your time with the other girls.

Those were the days when everyone did drugs. These women would take anything — the most amazing combinations. I wasn't a big druggie, so I was always ending up having to work hard at the end of the night — because someone would be passed out. Anyway, these women would tell incredible stories — especially once the drugs got going. So what I did was, I copied them down. But I didn't want to be like a sociologist, so I would retell them in the first person, then put in some of my dreams. I had all this text consisting of these great stories plus my dreams — there was a murder story... some things were pretty wild...'

We also received the following testimony from Peter Gordon about Acker working in a strip club: "For Kathy, stripping was politics and activism as well as a source of income. San Diego was, and is, an important military town. This was at the height of the VietNam war. Most of the customers at the clubs were naval servicemen — sailors out for a last night of fun before shipping out to war. The sailors were black, white, city kids, country boys. The dancers could choose their own music: Target would dance to music by Sun Ra, John Coltrane, Mingus, Velvet Underground, James Brown. The other girls would dance using moves from the latest popular dances, Target would dance interpretively, bringing out the angst as well as the erotic joy.

The girls would dance three songs: first in a skimpy outfit, the second song the top would come off and the bottoms would come off during third song. After three or four girls had finished their sets, they would get into a pink car and get driven to another club in another part of town. There were four or five clubs in the circuit; and the customers at the clubs would get a high turnover of dancers over the evening. The girls were single moms, abused spouses, wives or girlfriends of prison inmates, as well as few hippies. Target was different from the other girls — she wasn't a California blonde with perky teeth and nipples — but when she connected, she touched souls longing for something, anything.

Kathy loved performing: her extroversion reinforced by audience approval. At the clubs, there was no buffer between audience and performer. The response was immediate, she knew immediately if a routine worked or not. The Times Square peep shows were for a small select audience, much like the poetry scene that she had been identifying with. In the strip shows, in front of dozens of young men, and a few women, she tasted the blood mass entertainment. She tried her hand at commercial porn (*Rip-off Red*).

And the direction of her writing changed. She is was no longer trying to emulate the poetry of Bernadette Mayer and Anne Waldmann, but began thinking of narrative. She devoured the writings of novelists Henry James, Wilkie Collins, Malcolm Lowery and Charles Dickens, whose serialized novels paralleled the Mail Art movement of the time

1. Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Melville House, 2018, p. 138-139.

(Eleanor Antin, *General Idea*, Ray Johnson, etc). And she realized, yet again, perhaps, that if you present avant-garde art (jazz, in this case) with some skin, the audience will come around.' [...]

I can't recall a specific incident why she stopped dancing. It may have had to do with a change of person booking the dancers, new girls coming in. Her chronic PID definitely might have impacted the dancing.

And it was pretty grueling, Not only were the hours long, but we were living in Solana Beach, about 30 minutes to an hour drive to downtown San Diego. And Kathy didn't drive, so I would drive round-trip to take her there and again to pick her up. And I'm not sure about the chronology, but at one point I was very sick and was hospitalized for a tonsillectomy, which effectively made it impossible for her to get back and forth to work.

But it's not like she got into 'the life' per se – she didn't socialize or associate with dancers when not on the job.

[Answering to the question if heavy use of drugs in the entertainment and night life world could have precipitated her leaving it:] Regarding drugs: I never knew Kathy to abuse drugs while we were together. It really wasn't her thing. She would sometimes smoke joints if they were passed around, and maybe a line of coke, later in NYC. Otherwise, I have no recollection of her seeking out drugs: she was more into natural foods and cures (often following a macrobiotic diet). And, of course, we know that ultimately her aversion to drugs (chemo) determined the course of her life."²

284 STRIPPER It's hard to say if, in the interview with Juno & Vale, she's talking about *Stripper Disintegration* or *Rip-off Red*. But what's so interesting about having *Stripper Disintegration* in this collection is that no one seems to know about it – *Rip-off Red* is widely acknowledged as THE text where she perfects the sex-work-lightly-attached to loose narrative conventions style – but we can read *Rip-off Red* as a worked-through version of *Stripper Disintegration*. So the question to us as readers/researchers would be, what does she figure out (in terms of literary protocols) in *Stripper Disintegration* that gives her what she needs to write *Rip-off Red*? [cf]

284 DISINTEGRATION The word seems to enter Acker's writings at in this text. It occurs previously only once in 1971 *Section from DIARY* (p. 70): I can't open myself to Lenny the way Paul spreads his legs for me it takes more disintegration destruction of my mistrust. It occurs with more significance in *Stripper...*: it's night no one to tell me what to do force me I disintegrate I'm a criminal and pervert it doesn't matter who I am anymore thousands of feelings every feeling possible there's a war on³ [...] what're you writing for keep sensitive all disintegrating parts in touch cut off a limb⁴. Then, again, in *Rip-off Red*, *Girl Detective* (from April-June 1973):

I have to disintegrate my mind to the point my mind is inseparable

1. Peter Gordon, email to the editor, July 3, 2019.

2. Peter Gordon, email to the editor, July 7, 2019.

3. *Stripper Disintegration*, cf. *supra*, p. 292.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 323.

from the common mind or my “unconscious”. By thinking: dreaming, following sexual and other desires, and by inflaming you with sensuous images, we can get rid of the universities, the crowded towns, the bureaucracies. I call up images of myself, or just images. They are “my” images and yet, they extend my knowledge. I usually find out that other people have the same images, and I know we are all connected. Fucking is a religious ceremony. People who have died are still thinking and choosing, for all thoughts and desires are connected and pulsing, in the utter blackness, back and forth. I’m not sure of this.¹

We follow “disintegration,” finally, to *Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*: This is a failure all I’m causing is my own disintegration. What’m I trying to do? My work and my sexuality combine: here the complete sexuality occurs within, is not expressed by, the writing.²

The title expresses a paradoxical movement. The “stripper” in the context of this text refers to an exposition, an exhibition of the concrete, of the whole and the lively, but Acker’s stripper figure ultimately is characterized by her decomposition, destruction of wholeness and of identity. The two opposing processes: expose/decompose, are thought as one dialectic.

284 3/73 This date (another title page is dated “2/73”) signifies that *Stripper Disintegration* was written just before *Rip-off Red, Girl Detective*, assuming that the latter was drafted more or less at the dates given to each of its parts – between April 20 and May 5, 1973 – and finished near June 2nd (1973), according to what Acker writes to Bernadette Mayer on that day. *Stripper...* would thus constitute her last radically “experimental” work before she passes to *Rip-off...*’s pornography mystery³ and to what she was still naming in early June “Ripoff Red Girl Detective II”, i.e. *The Childlike Life of The Black Tarantula*’s first installment (the first piece where autobiography-like materials and novel-like narratives are clearly used in parallel, and not woven together into one flow). Acker herself seems to make a distinction between art & memory and pornography.⁴ It could characterize her 1971-1974 oscillation between more opaque experimental writings – working against effects of illusion and against grammatical conventions using her personal life as material – and more novel-like compositions which take their inspiration from cheap commercial genres of the time.⁵ Yet the relationship between art & pornography is not always stable. As she wrote in the

1. *Rip-off Red, Girl Detective* (April-June 1973), Grove Press, 2002, p. 67.

2. *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*, feat. in *Portrait of an Eye, Three Novels*, Grove Press, 1998, p. 50.

3. Letter to Bernadette Mayer, dated “6/2/1973”, cf. *infra*, p. 344 — Cf. also the interview with Sylvère Lotringer, (“Devoured by Myths”), unexpurgated transcript, 1989-1990, in Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Melville House, 2018, p. 70.

4. Letter to Bernadette Mayer, dated [April 29, 1974], cf. *infra*, p. 548

5. As Acker stated later, *Rip-off Red* was supposed to bring her “lots of money”, and was intended to be published as a pornographic novel; it would thus make it the first literary project she started with that economic ambition. (cf. interview with Sylvère Lotringer, *op. cit.*, p. 70).

second installment of *The Childlike Life...*: I want to read books about schizophrenia, especially Laing's books and the books from Kinglsey Hall. I'm getting sick of pornography and murders which was all I used to be interested in'. It could mean that "pornography" alludes to all her production prior to summer 1973, which had been de facto heavily drawing from her personal experiences as a sex worker and from her sex life, and that "art & memory" would refer to more conceptual and less "self-expression" based experiments starting with *The Childlike Life...* and continuing with *Breaking Through Memory to Desire*. She may have felt by the summer 1973 that it was necessary to invent a new way of dealing with materials coming from her personal life, more radically deconstructing the "I". Prior to that date the first-person tended to refer to multiple reflections of herself all cut and pasted together, the "I" still adhered, generally, around the author. The "I" becomes one of the main characterizing factors of Acker's writing. Starting with *Entrance into Dwelling in Paradise* and *Stripper...* with the unattributed speech of her sex work colleagues inserted in the text, then in *Rip-off Red* with the "I am"/"I become" constructions, and fully expanding in *The Childlike Life...*, when the "I" truly and powerfully detaches from all sense of stable first-person. I'm trying to get away from self-expression but not from personal life. I hate creativity. I'm simply exploring other ways of dealing with events than ways my lousy habits – mainly installed by parents and institutions – have forced me to act.²

Stripper Disintegration is certainly the last example of an early style that won't come back in Acker's later writings. It constituted a return to the kind of prose she had invented in 1971 *Section from DIARY* and in *Politics*. In some ways, *Stripper...* and *Politics* are similar: as they mix memories (of her sex life, of her sex work experience, of her present and past life, of dreams and fantasies), non-attributed dialogue, commentaries by the author about her writing, and other levels of discourse, all pieced together. They also both use almost no punctuation and introduce blanks to give rhythm to the prose. Yet, *Stripper...* goes further in all these aspects, creating a far more opaque and chaotic prose which conveys fewer images and more abstract sensations. Acker seems to have used a great deal of dream narratives here (and drug-dreams/visions narratives) – **these are dreams I don't have anything to write about [...] mescaline dream**³ – which introduce performative and incoherent narrative lines. The text resorts actually to very few blank spaces between words but multiplies paragraphs; this combined with the absence of punctuation and the rare use of capital letters give the impression that the text doesn't breathe, its articulations are to be felt and generated by the reader in her effort to make sense out of it.

288 rape creep This scene – in which the father figure discovers his daughter had sex and as a result shows a sexually inappropriate and possessive attitude towards her and/or rapes her, at which point the narrator asks for help from the

1. *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*, feat. in *Portrait of an Eye, Three Novels*, Grove Press, 1998, p. 26.

2. *Ibid.*, 6th installment (Sept. 1973), p. 86.

3. *Stripper Disintegration*, cf. *supra*, p. 292.

mother –, and similar ones recur through Acker's works. As this is the first time it appears in this collection, it could very well be one of the earliest occurrences. In *Stripper...* the scene takes the form of a "dialogue", alternated speech-like sentences where the father's voice and "Kathy's" can be recognized by the content. In later works, the scene mostly reoccurs as a first-person, jaded narrative, recounted in the present tense, which gives the reader the impression that she's receiving a memory. For example in the "Part Two" of *Rip-off Red, Girl Detective* under the subtitle "Age 17": My father tries to rape me: he thinks that I've been fucking and he starts to cry, puts his arms around me, kisses me, generally glops. I phone my mother who's in their country house, tells her to calm down her husband or I'll never see either of them again. I refuse to kiss him.¹ In *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula's* first installment (June 1973), the anecdote also refers to the narrator's "future husband" (here it's "Acker") and relates the event to the socioeconomic differences between the lover's family and the narrator's: My father forbids our marriage because my lover's family has insufficient social connections. When my (adopted) father suspects I've been sleeping with my future husband, he slobbers over me. Rape.² This narrative figure plays on, as much of Acker's work does, the seeming inevitability of the patriarchal system, in which the father deals with the woman's body as his possession, designating himself as the only person capable of transferring its ownership, through marriage, to another. In this context, the denial of the conservative father's power makes him express his frustration and pretend he is the only one able to love his daughter "properly". As in Solanas' saying: His daughter, in addition, he wants sexually – he gives her hand in marriage; the other part is for him.³

289 Marilyn Monroe Early example of Acker's interest in using contemporary mythified public figures in her fictions.⁴

302 Rich Rich Gold. According to Peter Gordon: "Rich Gold (aka), born Richard Goldstein, had recently moved to the Bay Area – he had been a student of electronic music at SUNY Albany. He was friends with Warren Burt, our composer friend and classmate from UCSD now living in Melbourne, Australia. I believe that Rich was one of the residents at Honeymoon Hotel – a short-lived collective house where Blue Gene Tyranny, Phil Harmonic and others lived. Rich was a common friend, and when I was playing sax with the 50's-style rock band Butch Whacks and the Glass Packs (who I was touring with in Vancouver in 1974) Rich toured with us as spotlight operator. Rich was the live mixing engineer for the Trust in Rock concerts. Originally working in electronic music, he was changing his creative direction at the time more towards experimental literature. At the time, Rich was giving installation/performances in which he would

1. *Rip-off Red, Girl Detective* (April-June 1973), Part two, Grove Press, 2002, p. 66.

2. *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*, feat. in *Portrait of an Eye, Three Novels*, Grove Press, 1998, p. 4.

3. S.C.U.M. *Manifesto*, Valerie Solanas, The Olympia Press, 1971, p. 11.

4. About this, cf. her interview by Barry Alpert, at Mitali Restaurant (NYC), for *Only Paper Today*, March 30, 1976; pub. in Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Melville House, 2018.

write a complete novel in front of a walk-in audience over the course of a day, or two. He later became a pioneer in interactive media, creating the prototype for what would become *The Sims* computer game, among other projects.”¹

311 San Francisco Peter Gordon wanted to finish his M.A. at Mills College with Robert Ashley, but he had to wait until the end of the spring quarter in June. ² Acker also felt the need to get out of San Diego to find a job other than working at the strip club: I couldn’t bear leaving SD but had to, couldn’t make \$ in SD except by stripping & couldn’t stand doing that any longer, needed more input than my 5 friends... I thought SF could be a good alternative to NY... Peter wanted to get to a city, I could lead more of my double sexual life in SF etc.³

317 carrot juice This metaphor for menstruation is attributed to the mother figure in *Rip-off Red, Girl Detective’s* “Part Two”, under the subtitle “Age 10”: My mother tells me carrot juice is going to come out of me where I piss sometime soon and I shouldn’t get worried. All young girls, eventually, once a month, watch carrot juice flow out of their piss-holes. I wonder if I can drink it, and if my mother’s lying some more.⁴

317 carrot juice AND the carrot juice as menstruation comes back in the later articles on bodybuilding, indicating an ongoing preoccupation with menstruation, femininity, knowledge, health, pride in body, knowledge of one’s own body, and the capacity to name for oneself – an interest which spans Acker’s work from 1970s to 1990s. In an unpublished text titled “Women Who Have Big Muscles,” Acker uses the carrot juice image to talk about the negation of female bodies, which takes place through this false naming. Acker’s “language of the body” explored through body modification and her weightlifting practice offers an alternative to this negation, suggesting visualization and physical mutation in the place of naming or veiling (through metaphor):

As a result of internalizing these images, the girl can’t see her own body. She doesn’t eat according to dictates of hunger. She’s neither interested nor can become interested in her own physical possibilities: in her own musculature, in the development of her flexibility and strength. Nor in those areas where mind meets body. Nor in the actual complexity of her actual sexuality. Just as my mother told me that my own blood was carrot juice, so a woman will look at her undeveloped tricep and believe that she sees fat.

All human are blood, flesh, muscle, fat. Women have been educated to want to be physically nothing. To be absent. When a man sits on a tube seat, most often his legs are spread open, his arms fall outwards, and he’s sitting on twothirds or the seat. When a woman sits on the same seat,

1. Peter Gordon, email to the editor, July 3, 2019.

5. Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 78.

3. Letter to Jackson Mac Low, July 1973 (Jackson Mac Low Ppaers, Mss 10, Special collections and archives, UC San Diego Library); quoted by Chris Kraus, *op. cit.*, p 85.

4. *Rip-off Red, Girl Detective* (April-June 1973), Part two, Grove Press, 2002, p. 64.

she sits on a third of it: her torso crouches into itself as if she wants to disappear; her legs are crossed to hide what should never be named. What the carrot juice flowed out of. Don't say it. No wonder a woman who looks at herself cannot see herself.¹

[cf]

317 husband's cock Parallel passage in *Rip-off Red, Girl Detective's "Part Two"*, under the subtitle "Age 16": My mother tells me while my father and sister are listening that my father's cock is too wide and short for her and that he doesn't fuck her enough. I show I understand what she means.²

1. Kathy Acker, "Women Who Have Big Muscles," undated – but which, based on its similarity to the essay "Against Ordinary Language," is probably ca. 1993. "Against Ordinary Language," in *Bodies of Work, London: Serpent's Tail*, 1997 (1993). "Women Who Have Big Muscles" accessed in the collection of archived text available for scanning at the Badischer Kunstverein exhibition *Kathy Acker GET RID OF MEANING*.

2. *Rip-off Red, Girl Detective* (April-June 1973), Part two, Grove Press, 2002, p. 66.

Section from Diary

kathy acker
the black tarantula

(3/1973; pub. 11/1975)

KATHY ACKER

Section from DIARY

The Black Tarantula

3/1973

I'm in a jail sixteen years old the black women rule the jail I don't let anyone tell me what to do the white women are watching a show on T.V. the black women want to watch another show a black woman changes the channel I change back the channel the black woman again changes the channel I change back the channel the black woman goes for me my hands and feet are registered I can't fight back I'm against the wall my fists clenched the other girls finally tell me to hit back frightened I'm blank I see the black woman's brains all over the floor they send me to solitary three months I don't know what's happening I'll be sent to X the worst hole in California murdering the black girl finally at the end of three months one of the supervisors says I was hitting-out in self defense

* * *

Kathy Acker

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The text reproduced here was published in *Endangered Faeces*, #18, November 1975, ed. by Opal L. Nations, pub. by The Strange Faeces Press (NY), limited ed. of 300 copies, p. 43.

This text published in November 1975 was very probably written in Solana Beach in March 1973 as the title suggests. From Acker's speech in the *[Untitled Tape 2]* (March 1974, cf. *infra*, p. 530), we know that the story told here through the first-person was Kathy Kat's story, a colleague of Acker's from the strip club in San Diego, who worked there sometime between September 1972 and April 1973. It was probably extracted by the author in 1975 from the manuscript version of her diaries, or else it's a fragment of a longer unknown typescript that would have been composed in 1973. The signature "The Black Tarantula" probably isn't original, as we have so far no evidence¹ that the pseudonym was used prior to the *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*'s first installment in June 1973; in March Acker was starting to use "Rip-off Red".

Notes:

338 Section from DIARY This piece does not date well. Acker's project, particularly in later books such as *Empire of the Senseless*, is to show how language materially fixes power dynamics into place and maintains them. She uses depictions of extreme violence, cruelty, sex, and war, in order to show the historical residues in language, maintained by a system of knowledge and reason that is the product of and continually invested in sexist, racist, imperialistic projects. She describes her project in *Humility*, the text she produced in reaction to the time she was sued by the author Harold Robbins. She writes:

[...] said that she composed her texts out of 'real' conversations, anything written down, other texts, somewhat in the ways the Cubists had worked [not quite true. But thought this statement understandable.] Cited, as example, her use of True Confessions stories. Such stories whose content seemed purely and narrowly sexual, composed simply for the purposes of sexual titillation and economic profit, if deconstructed, viewed in terms of context and genre, became signs of political and social realities. So if the writer or critic (deconstructionist) didn't work with the actual language of these texts, the writer or critic wouldn't be able to uncover the political and social realities involved. For instance, both genre and the habitual nature of perception hide the violence of the content of many newspaper stories.²

After some analysis, Acker's books after *Don Quixote* are where she grows into this project, getting to a style that is violent but nuanced, only lightly narrative but held together by a deep thread of psychological and political preoccupations (longing, colonialism,

1. A closer study of Acker's archives at Duke and at the Fales, especially the manuscripts kept at the latter, could give other results.

2. Kathy Acker, "Humility," in *The Seven Cardinal Virtues*, London: Serpent's Tail, 1990.

violence, love). Her mastery of this style happens precisely the moment when she remarks switching styles, moving from the more manual experimental work (her experiments with cut-up and re-writing) into myth. She says, "*Empire of the Senseless* is my first attempt to find a myth, a place, not the myth, the place." In this passage from *Empire*, Acker seems to define her vision of how literature can attack the supports of a "repressive society,"¹ speaking of and through a theoretical passage on *The German Romantics*:

The German Romantics had to destroy the same bastions as we do. Logocentrism and idealism, theology, all supports of the repressive society. Property's pillars. Reason which always homogenizes and reduces, represses and unified phenomena or actuality into what can be perceived and so controlled. The subjects, us, are now stable and socializable. Reason is always in the service of the political and economic masters. It is here that literature strikes, at this base, where the concepts and actings of order impose themselves. Literature is that which denounces and slashes apart the repressing machine at the level of the signified. Well before Bataille, Kleist, Hoffman etc., made trial of Hegelian idealism, of the cloturing dialectic of recognition: the German Romantics sung brazenly brassily in brass of spending and waste. They cut through conservative narcissism with bloody razor blades. They tore the subject away from her subjugation to her self, the proper; dislocated you the puppet; cut the threads of meaning; spit at all mirrors which control.²

For Acker, presenting language at its most violent works both to hold a mirror up to culture's violence as maintained through all language and sense, and to do this work of "cut[ting] through conservative narcissism with bloody razor blades." Maybe we can look at this text as a failed attempt to mirror back carceral violence and racism.

So why does it fail? It seems here that Acker has not yet found a method that combines her identity work with her more elaborated later projects of questioning the power dynamics that stabilize language and sense more generally. At the end of this short piece, we are left with an identity experiment that functions inasmuch as it forces the reader to question the reality and function of the first-person narrator, and to pay attention to how texts are constructed to either invite or refuse identification — but that does this at the expense of the non-problematized victims of this scene and of the prison system being depicted, more widely. The real mutilated black bodies recede to the level of décor, becoming the condition of possibility for a writing experiment, and this is a political failure. [CF]

338 The Black Tarantula It's the first appearance, in this volume, of Acker's pseudonym (but, as we just mentioned, its appearance here is not chronologically original). Asked by Sylvère Lotringer about it she couldn't explain its precise origin and reason but she remembered a contextual influence in the San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury of that time: It was this ambiance in which everyone was sort of

1. K. Acker, "On Two of my Texts," *Bodies of Work*, London: Serpent's Tail, 1997 (1989).

2. Kathy Acker, *Empire of the Senseless*, p. 12.

androgynous. You weren't gay, you weren't straight, it was very loose. And everybody changed their names, everybody wore makeup, everybody dressed up all the time.¹ A passage in *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula* could nevertheless give a clue to the personal meaning she associated to the pseudonym, a symbol of her longing for control: I want control over my environment. Like a fat spider I sit and wait. I float. [...] I look at my body as if it were a web, solely a way of asking people to touch me. My body doesn't exist.² The body as a spread web – thus it “doesn't exist” as an object –, as a trap to capture and control, suggests that the pseudonym could have been deeply linked to Acker's experience of working in the sex industry, and developing an art that developed and played on a power over spectators. Indeed, as far as we know the first time Acker used a pseudonym in public it was while working at the strip club in San Diego where the strip club manager had given her the name “Target”³; at roughly the same time, she chose and began to use “Rip-off Red, Detective” as a writer.

338 I'm in a jail According to what Kathy Acker tells to the camera in the March 1974 *[Untitled Tape 2]* this first-person narrative was actually the appropriation of a colleague's story, a fellow worker at the strip club named Kathy Kat, with whom Acker worked in San Diego sometime between September 1972 and April 1973. After hearing it in the dressing room, where, according to her, her colleagues, loosened by drugs, talked abundantly, she wrote it down keeping the speaker's first-person point of view.⁴ As David Antin suggested, she then sent the text to Carol Bergé, a magazine director who rejected it vehemently. We can imagine that the text was actually longer than what is presented here, although no other version of it is known by the present editor. Later, in her interview with Sylvère Lotringer, Acker argued that it's through this work and Bergé's reaction that she understood the power provided by the pronoun “I”. As we see here Acker presents the fragment as “Section from Diary” (the same title she had used for her 1971 piece cf. *supra*), thus encouraging the confusion between autobiographical and fictional material. The reader of this book can refer to Acker's speech in the *[Untitled Tape 2]* (cf. *infra*), and then compare it with this excerpt from a 1989-1990 interview: David Antin said to me, there's one magazine of prose work that you could publish in that's in the poetry world — Carol Bergé's magazine. So I sent her some material. I was working as a stripper to earn money and I would spend most of my time hanging out in the dressing room with all the other strippers hearing stories. It was the days of a lot of drugs, especially hallucinogens, so the girls just got totally wacked out of their minds and would tell great stories. I started writing the stories down, but I didn't

1. Interview of Acker by Sylvère Lotringer (“Devoured by Myths”), unexpurgated transcript, 1989-1990, in Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Melville House, 2018, p. 69.

2. *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*, feat. in *Portrait of an Eye, Three Novels*, Grove Press, 1998, p. 57.

3. Peter Gordon informed us that, contrary to what many have said, Acker didn't choose “Target” (email to the editor, July 2, 2019).

4. Cf. *Stripper Disintegration*, cf. *supra*, p. 303: “junky-whores I'll interview them they're really smart”.

want to be a sociologist. The stories were very immediate to me, so I put everything in the first person, plus some of my dreams. I sent this material to Carol Bergé, and she sent back the sort of usual note: Oh great stuff, lots of energy, send more. So I'm babysitting one night for David, and I see this letter on the floor. I see my name, so, of course, I read the letter and it's from Carol Bergé saying, *This woman is a total nut-case, lock her up in a loony-bin* (thinking that these stories were all about me). I mean it's very hard, I was sensitive in those days, but I remember being very fascinated that the work had that kind of power. So I became very interested in the use of the word "I".¹

1. Interview of Acker by Sylvere Lotringer ("Devoured by Myths"), unexpurgated transcript, 1989-1990, in Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Melville House, 2018, p. 77-78.

[Letter to Bernadette Mayer]

kathy acker

(6 / 2? / 1973)

136 ½ N. Sierra, Solana Beach, Ca. 92075

Dear Bernadette,

6/22/73

Heard from a friend in New Mexico yesterday you have a new book out; could I have a copy? I'd be glad to send whatever \$ necessary. Please send soon as I'm leaving for Frisco in a month — I don't know where — some guy told me yesterday (info on what's happening to me) I was showing him POLITICS & newer stuff, the guy knows Ashley, worked with him, "why not show this to Ashley he'll give you an M.F.A." "huh you mean he'll hand me an M.F.A. that means \$" "yeah he's just like you he'll dig it etc. tell him I sd. etc." It sounds mushuginah but maybe they're handing out M.F.A.'s these days maybe they're handing out \$, I'll take anything. I've got this other scheme — how to get \$ & do exactly what I want to do — I just finished this pornography mystery story RIPOFF RED: GIRL DETECTIVE — basically about illusion us. illusion very abstract but you wouldn't notice it, just like BILLY JACK, you're so entertained & so much sex you don't know you're being blurred on the head until you fall down WHOOM ~~so-maybe~~ you see it's all about how you have to pretend to write a conventional blahblah, actually do what you want, to eat, sleep, fuck, other perversities. RIPOFF RED GIRL DETECTIVE II is not ~~going~~ (about) how I'm go to get rich, it's information, series of — about murderesses. I'm thinking of killing everyone. ~~to~~ When I type up RipOff I, I'll send it to you, ~~but xeroxes are going to cost me \$500 so please~~ skip that crap. I'm getting nuts these days.

By the way: (this is a little maniacal so I'm maniacal, good Jewish saying) could you give me info, about a guy I think you know

Dan Graham. This is scene: I met him at David's (Antin), for various reasons known & unknown developed super crush on him, called him up 'will you sleep w/ me?' "yes" slept w/ him one night. That morning he says "call me Friday" like he really wants to see me, I call him, no answer, 2 days later get hold of him he acts like I'm the biggest creep possible "I don't want to see you, goodbye". It's not that important, but I'm hurt, mainly because I'm confused: (1) Did he want to sleep w/ me in 1st place? Maybe males sleep w/ anyone one time. (2) Why did he ask me to call him Friday? (3) Usual paranoia thoughts. Just for my own self knowledge, if you have any info, pertaining to subject, please reply, any info's of interest. How's your movie etc. have you written others: I don't have anything else to say except I think about you & Ed would like to hear from you. O, also I saw Harris, a few weeks ago: he's living down here w/ some woman I acted nasty to him because he was acting like he wanted to stay here for a few weeks, I was writing RIPOFF, writing 8 hrs. a day, had to be alone. He's not in the best of shape. [3]

Love you all, Kathy Acker.

This letter is part of the 15 letters (24 pages of typewritten and manuscript text) archived at UCSD Library Special Collections & Archives – United Artists Records – Kathy Acker to Bernadette Mayer – Mss. 1, Box 1, Folder 1.

The transcription was made from a 2014 scan.

It is a 3-page handwritten letter on blue, lined and perforated paper. Numbers in the interior margin correspond to our pagination.

Notes:

344 RIPOFF RED In her book *Against Memoir* writer Michelle Tea tells young queers to stop writing about sex because, like, everyone has it. But there's such vitality to early sex writing and that's totally what we get with *Rip-off Red*. Later, Acker's sex is woven in, procedurally important, used to move the reader through tenses, modes of embodiment, and moments of ultra-present-tense repetition. But here the sex is mainly used to cut the intellectual parts in a work of high-low pastiche, and as a result the sex writing itself is particularly vibrant. For an example: His fingers enter my cunt I know I've found Prince Charming flames burst from the upper arcs of my legs. My gums and nipples and cunt grow wet and tender. I want him to take his hands, to thrust them hard under my thighs, to raise my thighs up to his wet mouth, to ease my ache with his tongue and teeth and lips all trembling shaking furiously. He'll have to bring me fame and fortune. He places his hands under my thighs. I let my weight fall on my calves and feet; I squeeze my knees around his thick open mouth. I lift up my thighs; he lowers his mouth, suddenly sticks his tongue into my open ass. His tongue feels strange; as he moves his tongue slowly from my ass down to my clit, the lines of nerves from my ass to my clit to my spine start to tingle, vibrate harder and harder as he gently moves my hair away, touches his tongue against my million-times aching clit. Just enough to tease my clit; to keep my nerves aching. He presses his teeth against my clit, begins to suck, harder and harder; my clit swells without helping me come. I thrash around; I get angry; I'm never going to ease my burning and lust; I dig my fingers and fingernails into his head: scratch; he bites and nibbles me harder. I can't stand this. I lift my thighs higher I twist like a shot animal. His long tongue touches my clit stops touches my clit stops arcs over the clit now harder now harder I start screaming madly I clench my hands into his head he presses his tongue deep into my cunt swollen leaps at my clit hits it. As I come, moving my fingers, drunk as any rich biddy, I remember how sweet I felt pressing my mouth against Spitz's cunt wet in the godforsaken airplane bathroom.¹ [cf]

345 Dan Graham Acker's "super crush" and affair with conceptual artist Dan Graham in May 1973 fed several of her texts. According to Acker, she met him at the Antin's, slept with him one night after that in LA, then tried – unsuccessfully – to call him. They eventually ran into one another in the street, and he told her he doesn't want to see

1. Kathy Acker, *Rip-off Red*, *Girl Detective*, op. cit., 40-41.

her. She felt “hurt” by what she lived as a rejection, and “confused” by his attitude which doesn’t allow her to understand if she ever mattered to him. A comparable narrative is to be found in a more straightforward and detailed version in the 1st installment (June 1973) of the *Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*: (I call up D in Los Angeles do you want to sleep with me when and where there why don’t you spend a few days with me I’ll call you tomorrow. No call three days later I’m maniacal I have to see D I don’t know him hello I’ve got a ride to Los Angeles lie I’m not sure I know where we can stay should I not come up come up. We don’t touch talk about anything personal until we get to motel never talk about anything personal spend night together I have to be at Irvine in the morning I’m busy call me Friday. Do you want me to call you yes. I call Friday call Saturday Sunday this is Kathy O uh do you want to spend a night with me again are you too busy I’m too busy uh goodbye have a good time in New York uh goodbye.)¹ Here as in the letter she harshly characterizes her attitude (“maniacal”², “creep”, “paranoical thoughts”) as if she’s holding herself against a masculine-identified norm of self-control. This feeds into the recurrent theme of Acker feeling guilty for scarring her loved ones. She sometimes blames herself for her vulnerability, which she expresses trying to cover by acting as tough as possible, as well as what she describes as an incapacity to express her feelings and to understand those of others.³ Acker’s writing often sets up and plays on a psychoanalytic trope in which the absolute recognition and love requires from her to always disappoint and scare those from whom she expects it. This out of the hope that, by not rebuking the “sex maniac” character, they will accept her in spite of everything and through love surrender the control to her. The rejection of a man like Graham, five years older and much more established as an avant-garde artist, probably struck as a hard blow (the narrator in the same text claims she cannot “fuck P because D hurt” her – cf. infra). But this experience functions on the level of the text as confirming what she knows about herself, and serves as a catalyst for her taking back the control of the relation by recounting it as a narrative and fantasizing it further. Showing she knows what is happening, in narrative terms, she attains the unique freedom of a narrator. The letter she writes to Bernadette, within the terms of the story created here, turns out to be the first step of her taking power and the means by which she becomes desirable

1. Feat. in *Portrait of an Eye, Three Novels*, Grove Press, 1998, p. 4.

2. “Maniacal falling-in-love” (*ibid.*, p.9) is a recurrent cracterization of herself or her narrators throughout those years. Moreover: “I deal awkwardly with people I fall in love with” (*ibid.*, p. 11).

3. “(I don’t like or don’t care about most people; when I decide I like someone I overreact I scare the person. I know I’m going to overreact, no one I like will like me, I try to hide my feelings by acting like a sex maniac, excuse me, would you like to sleep with me, I begin to think I’m only sexually interested in the person. I chase the person, I’m vulnerable, I act as tough as possible to cover my vulnerability. I don’t know how to tell people I like I want to be friends, sit next to them so I can smell the salt on the skin, try to learn as much as possible about their memories, ways of perceiving different events. Because most people I like don’t like me, I’m scared to show them I like them. I feel I’m weird. I don’t comprehend what signals a person I like gives indicate the person likes me, what signals indicate the person dislikes me.)” (*The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*, 1st installment, June 1973, op. cit. p. 16).

(which means not only being in control of him and of herself but also of the relation). She dreams Dan reads it and decides he now likes her: (I fantasize D calls me that's impossible I fantasize he reads my letter to B he finds out decides he likes me we're both in New York or Los Angeles he undoes my black velvet cape, puts the palms of his hands over my nipples, rubs his hands quickly up and down his hands swerve around to the center of my back he pulls my body against his body I begin to open my stomach he leads me to a hard bed lays down his stocky body under me).¹ But beyond the fantasy, beyond the seduction it can operate upon others, the writing is also the opportunity to enact psychic revenge, to be cruel toward the beloved, an impulse that comes directly from the established dialectic of self deprecation + longing for recognition: In what ways is my desire to have someone I love with me connected to a desire to murder?² Coming out of this dynamic, Acker's descriptions of sexual encounters very often seem to be filled with the ironic cruelty of a puppeteer's show, in which all of the limbs are written under strict control. She creates a writing of encounters in which power is freely taken and given by each participant. Not much is known about Graham's and Acker's relationship beyond 1973. In Oct.-Dec. 1974, she writes a list of her "male stars" to Mayer, putting Graham on a separate list: the distant "on outs".

345 8 hrs. a day The rhythm of her working sessions to create *Rip-Off Red, Girl Detective* – rhythm she seems to have adopted since she started to work on serials on the West Coast (she had moved in Sept. 1972 from NY to Solana Beach, and in July 1973 to SF) – corresponds to what the narrator (the voice speaking between parentheses, in the following excerpt) describes in *The Childlike Life...*'s 1st installment (June 1973) about her writing: (I awake between 11:00 and 1:00 for a half hour to an hour, clean up, talk to friends, eat, spend an hour on the beach, exercise, work for the next 8 hours taking 3 or 4 short breaks, eat a quick meal, drink wine or play chess to calm myself, fuck or don't fuck, fall asleep. I speak to almost no one because I find it difficult to find people who will accept my alternating hermitage and maniacal falling-in-love. My style forces me to live in San Francisco or New York. I don't want to learn to drive a car I love cities I have to be sure I keep working hard in a large city.) And further, focusing on masturbation while writing: (I wear men's clothes, jeans cut an inch above the hair of my cunt I hold the jeans up with a studded brown leather belt when I sit on my waterbed where I write the material of the the crotch of the pants presses against my cunt lips I'm always slightly hot I masturbate often when I write I write a section 15 minutes to an hour when I unbuckle my brown belt either unzip my jeans and/or squeeze my hand between the cloth of the jeans and my abdomen the lower palm of my hand masturbating calms me down maintain a level energy I can keep working the last two days I haven't wanted to fuck P[eter Gordon] because D[an Graham] hurt me I wear men's clothes jeans cut an inch above)³.

1. *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*, 1st installment, June 1973, op. cit., p. 5.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 19. And cf. also p. 20.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 9, 11.

The beginning of
The Thesmophoriazusae

kathy acker
the black tarantula

(7-9/1973)

Red's Detective Agency, Inc.
46 Belvedere St.
San Francisco, Ca. 94117
Two weeks late.

Dear Charles Doria,

Looked and looked at *LYSISTRATA* and translated some of it but I couldn't get my interest up, so to speak, too much of it came off as women's lib cant which I guess I've heard too much of or something, or maybe I just changed sexes; anyhow, for no reason at all a week ago I read *THE THESMOPHORIAZUSAE* totally fell in love with the play, I immediately saw the Angels of Light or The Ridiculous Theatrical Company doing it in full drag, so I started working on the play immediately. I'm sure this screws everything up. Anyhow, I finished an introduction to the play, which for me clears through some of the ideas (historically-in my head) so I can get to the play and do that: pure entertainment, fantasy, farce. Blackness heaviness surrounding this incredible dance of drag-queen angels. I'll run down some of my main ideas about my translation 'translation' so to speak, then give you the introduction I want to the play which is basically a *TARANTULA* of ideas in juxtaposition to the *TARANTULA* of fantasy that follows, I like sharp juxtapositions if even if it is a wierd concept of translation, but then I had to do all this reading about 450 B.C. and after Greece and about Aristophanes so I could see what I was experiencing and I didn't want all that experience to be left unrecorded.

In short, I see 'translation' being my documentation in words

of my experiences while immersing myself in THE THES. and info about THE THES. as much as possible. I can't get back to 450 B.C. 411 B.C. NO WAY and I don't want my writing even
[2] my translating to be an act that occurs apart from the other acts of my life. So if every act I do is total, I have to translate autobiographically, and that means including the ideas I read think express feel act on etc. that preceed my actual translation of words of play. Obviously even with translation of words of play there'll be collage-style diary accounts intervening. O.K. Those are the main ideas behind the form of the introduction I'm sending you.

Then I'll quickly outline my ideas of main images narration of play so you can see the direction my translation will head. I'm sure all of these concepts are wierd and unethical, but I'm wierd too.

O.K.

(1) I think I already did this in my verbose way: explained the main idea I have of translation: Quickly: I'm translating words put down 411 B.C. by reading those words over and over, reading documents historical mainly about the time the culture the thoughts etc. that were circulating and partly caused those words to be written, watching how I act think feel etc. what words I use to literally translate Aristophanes' words, and documenting all this in the real 'translation'. Ideas for this procedure I'm sure are obvious, and I've been oversimplifying tremendously.

(2) My introduction: see following pages. I'll be sending some of litteral translation of words as soon as possible because now I'm working fairly fast. Tell me what else you need, anything. Sorry about this delay.

(3) I see as main ideas of THE THESMOPHORIAZUSAE:

IMAGES: Image of DRAG (drag as a philosophy and way of life) which leads in its ideas to image of DANCE (THE END OF PLAY)

Dance as total possible joy in actual life. However, this outcome though actual is tenuous and surrounded by black reality (to keep using images): a series of frames (reality and fantasy) swirling around each other.

[3]

The narration elucidates these main images. The women (I see the women as a group of roaring dykes: dykes versus drag-queens; what an image of the present!) who are reality want to kill the poet Euripides. Euripides uses fantasy, gets his father-in-law in drag which is a totally wonderful fantasy human and wonderfully funny to stop the women from condemning him. He uses fantasy to attack. Then a total drag-dance occurs: the women are fooled by the fantasy, another drag queen comes in and stops the fantasy, and now the father-in-law's in a mess. So far Aristophanes has played off the fantasy-reality war by showing fantasy as funny but low, the father-in-law is a ~~wild~~ lousy woman, and then the father-in-law's wonderful speech about being a woman! Very tacky, even sleazy, to use current slang. But then: Euripides has to rescue his father-in-law and he does this by using high camp, not low camp, grand tragic speeches: all those disguises as Perseus and Andromeda etc. This is the other side of drag, homosexuality-fantasy: obvious social and political implications. The only place where poetry exists (no wonder Plato loved Aristophanes). Can the poet enchant the women into his world so they will return his father-in-law, and here is the crux of the play. Of course I'm not sure of the ending because I want to get there, go through all this, how else can I know? but I do know everything ends with

the DANCE: (last speech of play: this all been fantasy (that frame)
and now go home, may the goddesses the women of fantasy believe our enchantments!)

O.K. That's all. I hope it's enough, and if necessary use anything in this letter for whatever: I'm not exactly sure what you need to send Swallow. And thanks thanks. Sent books to your brother.

Thanks & Love, Kathy

(The obvious idea of Aristophanes: that politics should be determined by sexual & individual needs, not vice-versa, this idea is important to me)

Basic Ideas:

Long years of war are making me crazy: they're destroying my brains, my capacities for clear thinking, and my aristocratic morality. I can see the collapse of this society, the unending war: events that take place day after day.

Black. black. black. The horror of class war breaks down the moral principles of individuals. These connected events occur again and occur since human nature doesn't change. During peace, peace which I as a child have never known, individuals consider reason: the individual guesses the needs desires of other individuals or the nature of future events and subsequently modifies his her actions. During wartime, individuals have to consider only their own needs desires because everyone wants to kill everyone else. The FDA's forbidding me to use protein supplements I can get only poisoned meat at prices I can't afford to pay forbidding me to buy enough vitamin E to counteract pollution in my body there're no known bad effects of vitamin E; in order to survive. I obviously have to destroy the FDA. All I want to do is fuck. Become other people. I hate universities I hate those humans who try to make me a robot by making me repeat the alphabet one million times a day smile at people I don't want to smile at bring people food and waggle my tail who I want to piss on. If I follow my hates, I don't turn myself into a robot-tyrant so that I can get a job only way I can earn money which buys food and shelter, I have to depend on my brother's slave labor working at a porno-shop two dollars an hour. Pain. Within this continuing war

[2]

(revolutions, faction-wars, plots, reprisals), the memories of these minor wars in individuals cause increasingly violent reprisals.

My language changes. I can only talk about joy. Words which formerly applied to degraded ways of life now are used proudly and words once used with sacred delight are now forgotten. Look at Watergate politics. (This is obvious.) Nixon was shrewd because he plans Watergate and Ervin, because he detects the plot, and you and me are shrewder. Ha ha. Stick up for the nearest (political) community because then you can act without thinking. Robots-accomplices. I don't trust anyone because of this war. If I trust anyone, I'm becoming weakheaded and crazy. No political leaders fight for high ideals, but for money even money for everybody. Fantasies no longer exist except in the heads of the insane (me).

I wrap myself in black furs, and stretch my muscles.

In the beginning there were hermaphrodites, not men nor women. Hermaphrodites were proud, strong, greater than men or women; they tried to become Gods the Ideas men and women moved toward. The real Gods punished them. They mercilessly bisected the hermaphrodites: bisexual. 'Love' is actually the desire I have to become a hermaphrodite. Obviously. Now everybody appears in drag, and the amorphous sexuality in which I totally live is a sign?, a connection to this dying civilization. End of Athenian empire, end of Roman empire, end of North American empire? World? People today are half men, half hermaphrodite (male and female halves), half women; or, homosexuals, heterosexuals, lesbians.

[3]

Homosexuals are tops because they're FIRE, manly, totally virile.
Out comes the sperm! (A creep's saying this.)

Therefore I want always to be with my brother, every minute of the day, never separated during this blackness for a night a minute a second; I want to become my brother as we I fight this blackness in as many ways as we can and further. When my form changes, I die, I am we and no more separation is possible. I'm sick of being constantly scared, physically sick, and horny.

Law the tyrant of men and women forces me to act against nature. Nature is my desire to stay alive and be happy. How can I in words dangerously attack the concept of laws? Either the law of the state is the highest standard for human life and coincides with the divine government of the universe, or else I have to live either in eternal chaos away from human laws or find some certainly outside human law in the eternal order of nature, or do both.

clash of energies. The nature of the universe is now determined by [4]
the nature of democracy; the Spirit no longer determines human actions and thoughts.

~~Constantly scared of the black cloud, I (Swift) marry my [illegible]~~

Events in this translation so far taken from: THE THESMOPHORIAZUSAE by Aristophanes, SYMPOSIUM by Plato, PAIDEIA by W. Jaeger, THE EMERGENCE OF GREEK DEMOCRACY by W.G. Forrest, EXPLORATIONS by W.B. Yeats, and myself.

After this introduction, lights come on in full, and play begins.

By the Black Tarantula 1973.

The text reproduced here is the combination of a 3-page typed letter and a 3-page typescript, archived at Duke University Libraries, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library – Kathy Acker Papers – Writings – Other writings – Box 23 – Folder 18 – *The Thesmophoriasuzae*.

The letter is numbered from [1] to 3 and the typescript from [1] to 4.

Acker's handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to the typescript's original pagination.

The letter, and very probably the text as well, were written in San Francisco where she had moved with Peter Gordon (an apartment on 46 Belvedere Street) at the end of June-beginning of July 1973 (but she had considered moving there since at least March¹). The text, thus, most come later than July, as indicated by the signature – “The Black Tarantula” – and the allusions to the *Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula* (the serial's first installment was sent out in June). The use of “Red's Detective Agency, Inc” as her address, allusion to *Rip-off Red, Girl Detective* completed late May-early June, points to the likelihood that *The Thesmophoriasuzae* was composed in close proximity to *Rip-off...* – close enough for Acker to still identify with that pseudonym. We therefore date it from July-September 1973.

Notes:

352 translated some of it but I couldn't get my interest up, so to speak, too much of it came off as women's lib cant ... for no reason at all a week ago I read THE THESMOPHORIAZUSAE totally fell in love with the play... pure entertainment, fantasy, farce. Blackness heaviness surrounding this incredible dance of drag-queen angels. We're in central Women's Liberation Movement territory here, historically speaking, which means that Acker's surrounded by a wave of feminism, and she's reacting to it. These Acker experiments from the late 60s and early 70s predate feminism's entry into the university; these are her texts that are contemporaneous to the moment when feminism is surging as a movement, but doesn't yet have the historical importance that we have retroactively attributed to it. To give a sense of context: Luce Irigaray, who Acker draws heavily on in her later writing, will publish the French edition of *Speculum of the Other Woman* next year, in 1974. She'll publish the French language *This Sex Which Is Not One* in four years, in 1977, and neither text will be translated into English until the mid-80s. Hélène Cixous will publish her essay that theorizes “écriture féminine,” “The Laugh of the Medusa,” in 1975 and it will be translated into English in 1976. Monique Wittig has already published her amazon literary war story *Les Guérillères* (1969, translated 1971); this same year she publishes the French edition of *The Lesbian Body*, which will be translated into English in two years, in 1975. What are now seen as central works of Feminist & Gender Studies, like Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, will be published in 1990; Donna Haraway's “Cyborg Manifesto” will

1. Cf. *Stripper Disintegration*, cf. *supra*, p. 311, 317.

be published in 1985; key queer works like Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* will be published in 1987; José Muñoz's *Disidentifications* will be published in 1999. While we often categorize Acker as belonging to feminist literary activism and practice, her writing evolves with and inside of feminism organizing, integrating the surrounding political context and reacting to it. [CF]

350 In short I see 'translation' being my documentation in words of my experiences while immersing myself in THE THES and info about THE THES. as much as possible. Translation as an act of digestion, or incorporation of the environment into the body. We often see the connection of self and environment rendered porous; in later works like *Empire of the Senseless* this inscription of self onto surroundings and experience onto body happens through tattoos. Can we think about this style of digestive translation in parallel with tattoos? In *Empire* Acker writes:

What is the language of the 'unconscious'? (If this ideal unconscious or freedom doesn't exist: pretend it does, use fiction, for the sake of survival, for all our survival.) Its primary language must be taboo, all that is forbidden. Thus, an attack on the institutions of prison via language would demand the use of a language or languages which aren't acceptable, which are forbidden. Language, on one level, constitutes a set of codes and social and historical agreements. Nonsense doesn't per se break down the codes; speaking precisely that which the codes forbid breaks the codes.

This new way of tattooing consisted of raising defined parts of the flesh up with a knife. The tattooer then draws a string through the raised points of the flesh. Various coloration methods can be used on the living points.¹

Translation in the *Thesmophoriazusae* project refuses to treat translation as a linear transference of words from one language to another, but treats language instead, like Acker writes here, as "a set of codes and social and historical agreements," which she tries to inhabit by immersing herself in other texts. But immersion also happens physically; experience in Acker is never just a stream of language but is punctuated by linked points of experience. She fills her translation with experiential objects that are part of her life and the language field links them together like the tattooer that "draws a string through the raised points of the flesh." Aristophanes meets drag. [CF]

350 Charles Doria Charles Doria was a translator and editor, who collaborated with Jerome Rothenberg and Harris Lenowitz on 1978 *A Big Jewish Book: Poems & other visions of the Jews from tribal times to present*; he also edited in 1980 for Ohio University's Swallow Press *The Tenth Muse: Classical Drama in Translation* which presents translations by poets and classicists of ancient Greek dramas; it doesn't feature *The Thesmophoriazusae*.

1. Kathy Acker, *Empire of the Senseless*, op. cit., p. 134.

First part of:

Breaking Through Memories into Desire

I become Jane Eyre who rebelled against everyone.

kathy acker
the black tarantula

(11/1973)

First part of:

BREAKING THROUGH MEMORIES INTO DESIRE

I become Jane Eyre who rebelled against everyone.

by TBT 11/73 –

1.

The mist was too thick: my parents wouldn't allow me to take a walk. I had tried to wander away from my prison, (sneak out of the house, get someone to call me who they'd let me leave with) but I couldn't remember if I had any friends; I was scared of their sarcasm and mental punishments.

I was an only child: I had no ways of hurting them as much as they hurt me. I got myself into bad positions because I showed they hurt me: I cried, then hated myself for crying. I want to be as tough and hurtless as possible. That means having lots of friends. My mother always talked about her friends, "it is necessary to have friends." Ugh. I want to kill everybody. I was glad I couldn't escape the prison: outside the prison it was colder, wetter, and lonelier. Everyone's lonely nowadays because of Nixon the rich shits behind Nixon. Because I haven't changed totally inside-outside me. I was and am a rat, I was a skinny rat brown hair flies everyone yells "can't you ever keep yourself neat, you're repulsive" I was a true gutter kid my parents sister told me I was a freak.

(Figure out everything my parents sister told me because it all was false and I can throw it away:)

I'm real and crazy (like I'm still at intermissions between sex shows, meat dive pimps thieves off Sixth Avenue 42nd Street New York with my cup of coffee speak in French to ignore everyone but my pen, am I anyone? I don't know how to speak French)

(1) What did my mother tell me? All these things are false;

[2] (NOW: GET THROUGH FANTASIES)

(1) I'm repulsive I was only born because of an accident. I'm repulsive because my mother ruined her life because of me: when she was three months pregnant her lover (perhaps husband she never told me that with proof she wouldn't tell me his name) left her; 18 months later so that she has a man who won't leave her act too crazy she marries a man she hates despises makes into a vegetable to be sure he doesn't go crazy.

(2) I'm crazy because I don't act right but I'm never sure exactly why I don't act right so my craziness is the deepest part of me. I'm not like other people and I have to be exactly like other people for all possible reasons.

(3) My body, or rather touching my body is unnecessary. Touching someone else's body will make me pregnant. My mother loves her own body and over that, hates her body so these perceptions are confused.

(4) The worst event that can happen to me: I become pregnant. When I tell my mother I'm going to marry R, she asks me first thing "Are you pregnant?"

(Go back:)

(5) I must say "yellow" not "wellow". I'm cute when I say "wellow".

(6) I'm cute when I smile, ask questions.

I don't remember anything about my childhood, before I first entered school in first grade. The first event of my life I know I remember: my first grade teacher teaching the class the alphabet, wood desks, pencils, pencilcase that's mine, light green walls, metal swoop at bottom of green board with lines in it to hold chalk, black cloth eraser, chalk on board, an 'A' my name 'Alexander'.

[3]

Outside on the fourth floor roof, the president and vicepresident of the class just elected everyone's a female in play house wood, pastel paint on walls, I stick my tongue out at officers (this is the first act I can remember in my life I do) they criticize me, punish me in some way? rebuke me for dishonoring them.

(7) I see yellow. I see a pink ceiling, a ceiling with tiny intricate flowers on it. I feel a soft thick cloth my baby blanket, I don't want them to take away my baby blanket. They don't want to teach me anything; they want me to be as little of a bother to them as possible. I have to smile all the time. Be quiet. I shouldn't shit in my pants. In school I shit in my pants.

(8) Obviously I'm taught language, mathematics, to hear, see, smell, taste, feel. How much am I taught these things? How much have I any control over and/or remade my self and my perceptions? My baby blanket, I don't want to leave my baby blanket. I don't feel anything for any people. My mixed feelings for my mother happen later. I'm alone. I don't care any ways about being alone. I see different colors. I somewhat less see shapes. I hear sounds, but they blend: there is always sound.

My grandmother tells me to listen to her.

My mother tells me she wants to give me presents (equal love me) but I don't act right. I have to be more friendly and childish (cute, listen to her, curtsy), more direct (I'm too convoluted, I can't say my wants out straight) I have to pretend I don't totally hate her because she hates me won't admit that on top of my loving totally admiring her. I can't have any of the privileges happy contented people get.

[4]

"Can I touch my cunt mommy?"

"Don't ask questions. Children should be robots. You're my thing."

“Can I piss mommy, can I piss all over you and my dog?”

I want to be incredibly beautiful. My childhood now is when
I’m beautiful and alone, miserable alone.

I sit alone in the yellow room now black slide into the covers
(1) I’m crazy, therefore have to get through fantasies. The world’s
going to end: I dream the night before I’m in an apartment with
JM and S, sexual rearrangements everyone’s too crowded everyone
in the world’s too crowded I see the streets of the city, below, com-
pletely covered with people everything’s poison I have to get out,
armed camps Armegeddon spring up to imprison the artist nuts
like me some people are escaping, I walk through a wire fence,
I crawl under two more wire fences, low green grass in the high
mountains around Tibet too cold for the poison the holy monks
live until I reach Finland where the people who realize the end
of the world’s occurring have escaped are living, there are almost
no factories which have poisoned the world, I ride along the long
river in Finland WHOO WHOO skimming along my feet on the
water WHOO: I see only one factory, a low brick building with a
black chimney one thick whosh of smoke a black wire fence stuck
in the snow

[5] What do I actually see?

Thin black lines crisscrossing each other each line before
criss-cross one inch long, around lines large areas of white, three
or four long lines of brown which the black lines intersect: (one

picture). Long rectangle of light blue broken by long areas of white that I can barely see above the blue, bottom hard edge broken by a cylindrical shape of black, different colors of black so the area looks round, below: various areas of white, red, black: red in the middle, black on top of red and white because no other color cuts into the design of the black (simple repeating crisscrosses). Smaller areas of color. Do I see colors based on forms, forms based on color: which or do both cue my memories? Today I hallucinate this same end of the world because my brother's going to leave me. Or do I associate the pattern, now memory not dream, with the fear I feel, therefore decide I'm scared because the world's going to end? Rather the world's going to end because I'm scared: (this is the truth.)

.. *fantasy, sensorial
perception, dream
mixed*

I have almost no hair on my head, I cut it off the other day, I look like a clown or a young boy. My parents hate me. I want to give myself and you as much pleasure as possible. 11/5/73. Because I'm too scared to be a prostitute. (for free: frankly people should give me money because they have more money than I have.) Because I'm not sure what I'm doing. Because I'm incredibly beautiful.

I'm hallucinating. I don't fuck anyone.

Books are the only people who like me. Scratch my ass. I kiss my books before I go to sleep every night. I love myself. Folds of scarlet drapery surround my head, then panes of clear glass, then the greys on greys on greys: air, rain, thin shrivelled leaves. Leaves blown through the thin textures of my skin transparent layers upon layers of lips I tear up, nervous, blood drips down to my

[6]

skin I begin to run. Through mounds which disappear ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast. The rain doesn't exist the rain is me. I have to stand up to this misery

I don't want to die. My throat hurts I'm constantly high I have to do this as fast as possible. The realms of death lie to the North. I've shadowy notions of reality. Are my notions, i.e. the arrangements of my perceptions shadowy because I haven't (yet) been thoroughly socialized (robotized)? Therefore I have to figure out what other ideas I now have other than these shadowy to-be-formed notions: See outside: opaque black grey on all sides whitish dots over whitish dots no opaqueness. Mysterious therefore uncertain new therefore interesting. Events don't happen in repetitions. Nothing causes and/or conditions anything else. When I hear a story I don't understand the continuity of the story because I feel my emotions so strongly: happiness, fear. I always feel strongly, understand first through the feelings. Are these feelings 'my' feelings: either my ways of perceiving, my ways of reacting to storing categorizing the event-information; or the events themselves since there's no inside and outside my head, no 'my'? My memories don't make this clear.

- [7] My first memories are memories of feelings or my feelings now. I'm terrified of the family, their house.

"You don't possess anything," I remember, "you read too much you have no right to think you're a person, you don't have enough money you don't have any money, we're rich. Your father abandoned you. You don't know anything you don't know how to see."

I wasn't at first aware what was his intention: he lifted, poised

the book, hit me so that I fall to the floor, breaking my head against the wood. I looked up at my brother: I didn't understand.

"How could you" my eyes enter into his body "how could you be so wicked? What makes you want to hurt me and hurt me when I've done nothing to you?"

"How dare you talk to me. I didn't say you could talk to me you, you" He lifts his right hand, palm flat, slaps it twice back forth back forth across the cheeks of my face. I feel nothing. I feel see? his knee lift, upward, my chest I bend back arching on my knees I remember lashing out my arms whirl legs outward fast he yells "help" my father and mother run into the room and hit me.

I remember them throwing me into a black room the sound of the door hitting the wood wall the latch falling in place. I was born upstairs.

I want to fuck. (I want that image of affection: head closes toward mine, hands touch my spine through the skins of my back, thick upper legs, etc. So I don't mind this (sitting here alone night after night working.) I'm getting too complicated. Touch my lips touch my hands touch the skins under my breasts touch my cunt so I can come. Do I want someone to fuck with because my mother conditioned me to think I had to be with other people?) I want someone to fuck me I want to fuck someone.

[8]

So my feelings are definitely primary tools for my perceptions. Do I remember if I as a child had a self-image, what that or those self-images were? I was unhappy. I was an unhappy person. I was too proud I had to make myself more humble (this came from my mother's conditioning). I also knew I liked being proud. I

still like being proud. I was a boy (my adopted father wanted me to be a boy) courageous I'd do anything I was strong, quick, and intelligent. No. I wasn't like my two sisters, one who was headstrong and selfish, the other who was spoiled and beautiful. I was strange. I didn't know why I was strange because I tried to do everything my mother told me to. I was thin, skinny, my hair was always messy, I didn't wear the right clothes (my mother told me this.) I wore black tights black sweaters I was supposed to wear short white cotton gloves and panty girdles. I remember feeling too strongly, I was overwhelmed by the violences of my feelings. I disliked the me who my parents sisters and brother had made I didn't know how to deal with this dislike. I hated my brother because he had unjustly hit me and I had been unjustly punished for this. I was constantly miserable I didn't understand why I was miserable. (Continue with analysis of my feelings:)

Fantasies are tools for my perception, not ends in themselves. Example: I see two poet friends of mine in my mind we go to party in Berkeley or Oakland. There I see three guy writers I recognize two of whom I fucked a few months ago I kiss all three hello they're happy to see me. Writers artists musicians at party. They (these writers) sit with me we talk I see one hand going between the black corduroy of my pants skin over the bottom of my spine beginning of my ass I don't wear underwear down below my ass slightly in the crack of my buttocks until the tip of the fingers touch the red flesh of my cunt. Two hands reach round my sides lift up my light navy sweater above my breasts a mouth rests lightly leaning sideways an o around my soft right nipple. I keep

talking. Two musicians one artist I know walk up to me I introduce everyone. I want to fuck one of the musicians the fantasy is the way I fuck him. Is this fantasy useless worthless (?) unless I really fuck him (I haven't yet?) I.e. must fantasy necessarily be a tool? Do I enjoy sitting second by second hour after hour days acting in thoughts that don't correspond as far as I know to the world I perceive? Yes. Example: I freak out I go into the dark room I sit down on the floor my back against the wall my head under the silk tablecloth. The final room. I begin to cry; I don't understand why I'm crying or why I need to sit in the dark. As I begin to trip (become aware of my thoughts), my brother interrupts my attention. I can't return to my thoughts I'm angry at my brother I hide my anger become more upset. Are you insecure? Yes. Do you mind I'm having an affair with D? If so, my jealousy's trivial. You're worried about being poor? I don't like depending on you, but I need this period to work as hard as possible. This is a fantasy and is now a reality, apriori to my perceptions. [10]

I remember: the first time I remember exerting control over my being I decided to follow the things said in my books rather than my parents' hints and instructions. When I felt anxious doing experiencing something new, if I could find a precedent for the event in a book I liked I kept doing thinking feeling whatever.

I hear the rain still beating continuously on the staircase window, and the wind howling in the grove behind the wall.

What part of my simple physical perceptions've my parents family controlled and/or created?

(Do artists have to be sensualists? The fuck with art.)

[11] I hear a low groaning in back of me from beyond my right side to beyond my left, then starting again at the right, a non-fluctuating low-pitch sound. On the top of that, I hear discontinuous quick small sounds the other side of me beyond me. The pitches of these sounds seem to rise and fall in waves. I see red, red changing slowly to grey, the color outside my eyes changes from red to grey, through deepening shades of grey to total black. As the color outside my eyes becomes darker, it becomes more uniform. I'm in the room in which my parents have locked me. Do I see different colors -red, grey, black-, or just one slowly changing substance? Is this solely a language problem: red, grey, black are three different words unlike light red, red, dark red? If so, I learned even this basic mode of perception: my perceptions of physical outside (or my physical perceptions) are socially politically controlled.

How can I change the way I physically see? How do I want to change? Can I go back to the way I would see before I learned to speak? People become unlike orangatang when they learn to speak.

I begin to think about my father, the one who made my mother pregnant. If he's alive, he'll treat me kindly. Why I have no reason to think this. No one treats me kindly; I'm a miserable kid. Why do I think my father'll treat me kindly (my mother didn't teach

me this: she hates men)? When I was born, I thought every thing outside me was kind. Why did I think every thing one was kind? I felt sensations: warm, cold, wet, soft, gushy, tongue touch against shit against material. I was a sensualist. I felt feel.

O.K. I'm back there. How do I begin to distinguish sensations (remember?) More important: do I want to begin to distinguish sensations, or does my family make me do this?

I like certain sensations; I don't like others. I like warm, moist and dry, gushy, movement outside me, thick, soft, velvet. I don't like cold, windy, sharp, vinegar, pain. Pain's peculiar (that comes from family conditioning later). I can't remember about that. I move toward, I want, the sensations I like. I want to be in the environment I like. Are my perceptions now fantasies, or are they mirrors?

[12]

My mother tells me to do things, to be in places I don't want to be. When I feel pain, in order to stand the pain, I pretend I feel pleasure. Within-my-mind separates from without-my-mind. My mother's scared of without-her-mind.

I'm scared of the outside world. Therefore my mother and my family fucked me over by telling me what to do. What portion of me, what ways of percieving weren't fucked over?

I keep thinking either I'm going to die or everyone in the world's going to die. I'm in a dark cavern: here and there by what light I don't know long whitish jewel drippings now rock on the cave walls, the rest of the walls and roof of the cave is black, like deep blue or deep brown. The floor of the cave leads downward through a series of narrow winding caves.

Last night I dreamt, the last dream I remember, Peter (my brother) and I went to the country. I wanted badly to get to the country but we could never seem to get there: first, the weather kept changing: the skies would turn dark grey, the winds would begin to blast at the outside of our car; it was too cold and we could no longer get out of the car. We could never start for the country early enough in the day. Finally when we had started for the country early enough the sun was still out, we stopped by a roadside diner which looked like half-a-toll-booth-line to eat. I [13] walked up to these large windows in pale green walls, I had been told I forget by whom this was one of the best restaurants in the area. Everyone ate here. Pale white mashed potatoes and slabs of brown meat. I didn't feel nauseous, I thought the food tasted good. When we were ready to leave, the sky was again dark grey; it was too late to go further down the freeway into the country. I saw my brother and I in the country, wading in a shallow wide river, low flat green rocks, streams of white waters, trees spread out at the sides of the water. We had some clothes on. The air was light blue. We weren't talking. The leaves of the trees were light green.

We might have really been in the country: I don't remember.

I feel acute joy, that's the only way I can describe the emotion, when D who I love comes into town and when I get to go to the country. As far as I can figure out, my mother family told me nothing about these events.

The next thing I remember: I wake up feeling I've just had a huge nightmare; I see in front of me a red glare crossed with thick black bars. I'm on a ferry at night, I can't see either the black waters or the air which lap the sides of the ferry. The ferry's almost deserted. I hear the bell above the ferry ring three times. I hear

voices speaking with a hollow sound muffled by a rush of wind or water. I feel agitated, scared.

I turn to strangers: I know they can't hurt me worse than my parents know how to and do hurt me. A strange man's sitting by my bed. I put my thin arms around him, in my bedclothes, and hold him to me. If he turns against me and betrays me, that's the last straw, I'll never talk to a male again.

"Well, who am I?" asked the stranger.

[14]

"Are you going to leave me?" Did I know what 'leave' meant? Did I know what 'die' meant? Obviously I could remember because I remembered what environments to avoid, what environments to go toward. When I was three, my mother and her husband (?) went on a vacation, left me with my grandmother who I loved. I like when people leave me. My real father who was kind (I discussed this before) left me; he didn't see me again; therefore he died. When someone leaves me and doesn't ever come back, either that person hates me or dies. Since my real father doesn't hate me, he's dead. I'm scared again: all I ever know are my emotions.

I have to figure out the truth: how I feel, since every thing happens through my feelings or my ideas; and why I feel what I feel.

What does my mother really feel about me? (I'm making my new childhood.)

Late that night I hear voices. As quietly as possible I get out of my bed, in my white nightshirt, I slowly stepping on the rugs of the floor so that the wood doesn't creak, sneak down the small hall, turn left, down the large hall to the edge of my mother's bedroom. I hear my mother's and my nursemaid's voices. I have to find out what they're saying about me: Something about me being too smart. Perhaps selfish.

Next day, by noon, I could put on clothes; I put on clothes and

sat wrapped in my baby blanket my new one which was yellow by the nursery fire. I felt physically weak; worse: I was miserable. No sooner had I wiped one salt drop from my cheek, than another one followed.

[15] Are emotions of any use to me? I hear Creeley read his poetry tonight: the finest examples of lyric poetry. Each segment in no systematic way I can tell expresses (maps?) a certain emotion. The poems are boring. I don't give a shit about his emotions. Then why should I give a shit about my emotions, and why should I bore other people telling how I feel each second to second?

If I try to ignore my feelings, pay attention only to my thoughts and perceptions, as if these three modes of thinking are distinct, I become even more schizy. Go back. I remember feeling before I remember having thoughts or ideas. I remember feeling at the same time as touching, tasting, smelling, seeing. I felt strongly about my likes and dislikes.

Feeling has to involve remembering. Short-term memory at least. Remembering follows perceptions, does it also follow feelings? Obviously feelings condition physical perceptions or the memories of these perceptions. So all these modes of thinking exist simultaneously aren't distinct from one another. A language fuckup? I can't talk about my feelings, without talking about my other thought processes.

In my mind I hear a song:

Before my parents this brutal society fucked me over, I enjoyed myself.

I don't know where I'm going I don't know what I should do I can't see properly I have no one to turn to for help.

Why did my mother bear me? She didn't want to; or else

she did, even more malevolent, because she knows she didn't want to be with me and this world is malevolent. I have to split within-my-mind from without-my-mind because I can't change the brutality and loneliness of without-my-mind and I need a center of pleasure. within-my-mind makes without-my-mind pleasant. This change isn't my doing; I'm only a medium.

[16]

Since I'm only a medium I don't matter I can easily die. Then within-my-mind will completely separate from without-my-mind. Each time I deny myself what I want (refuse to make my desires actual), I begin to die.

Dying is best because I won't then exert my desires. My nurse sings me this song to train me. I begin to cry and cry because I'm morbidly suffering.

Did I feel sexual desire when I was a kid? Did I want to fuck?

I wanted what I wanted. I wanted my thick pink baby blanket, I wanted to roll in it, to hide myself in it. When they took it away from me, I hated them. Did I love anybody? I don't remember loving anybody; I remember being alone. I really wasn't concerned with anybody: people were forces which helped me or stopped me doing what I wanted to do. I have no sense of a person; I have sense of my mother. My mother was a person; she stopped me from doing what I wanted to do. I wanted to get away from her.

I was standing on a stool reaching up for a book; my sister couldn't speak yet; I thought her very stupid. I remember her mumbling baby talk. I reached down for her: I fell off the stool, I

made her fall off the stool. I felt bad, uneasy; I know that feeling. That feeling lies above (indicates) I'm not exerting my will toward realizing my desires because I've listened to my mother and am confused: do I want what I want what I want or do I want what I don't want; this confusion makes me (physical-mental complex) [17] shatter into millions of pieces against a black sky. Stars in a sky. 'Physical' and 'mental' are therefore false distinctions; again language society controls my perceptions.

Since 'physical' and 'mental' are the same realms (feelings, beings), sexual desire is desire to what? To touch and be touched therefore mentally to think. To touch my clit and come therefore to stop thinking; to simultaneously have complete power over and lose control willingly of myself. These definitions don't suffice. Nevertheless, obviously, as a child and now, I feel sexual desire to the extent that I can break clear of my perceptions which come from social controls. That is, all non-controlled thoughts, feelings, etc. are sexual.

Physical perceptions, simple seeing touching smelling tasting hearing, don't exist.

3.

If physical perceptions are also mental perceptions, how did I first perceive time relationships?

I've forgotten how to speak to people. I've lost my ability to

become friends with anyone, to make any sort of friendly gesture which isn't solely reactive? Am I also becoming a robot? I sleep by myself in a small closet; I take my meals alone and pass all my time in the nursery while my brother gets to work in the drawing-room talk to people. My mother shows me an insuperable and rooted aversion. [18]

I try to talk to my brother but he sticks out his tongue at me whenever he sees me. Once I could tell by the muscle alignments on his face, he wanted to be nice to me and become friends; I kicked him. Deep ire and desperate revolt awake my corruption. I would rather be a child than an adult; if I can't remain one-year-old all my life, I want to be a howling monster. My brother ran to our mother, told her I had punched him severely broken all his... She stopped him:

Five events happened: (1) I live think completely alone I want someone to talk to I like being alone but I don't like being alone all the time. (2) My brother wants to be my friend I don't understand this I'm used to brutality and loneliness. (3) I hurt my brother; (4) he tells our mother (I have no control over these events). (5) She's indifferent. She says she's indifferent. What are the time relationships of these events?

These are events I remember. I was alone for a few weeks, say from November 3 to November 20, though I don't exactly remember the dates. My brother used to stick his tongue out at me continuously, from when I was two years old until I left my home on the 19th of January (at the age of ten), the January which came directly after the November 3 and 20. Around November 20 my brother tried to be nice to me; certainly this event happened after my solitary confinement in jail. I thought my brother was trying to be nice to me because he was sorry for me, because he thought

I was powerless therefore it would be safe to be nice to me. I now sensed discreet people outside me (that is: who weren't me).

- [19] These people can and do hurt me, therefore they are unwanted environments. If I tell anyone the truth, because people mean me only harm, they'll take control of that opening in me and shove thorns in that opening. I can't ever tell the truth so I can't have any friends. If I admit I'm miserable, I can begin to relax; since I can't become much more miserable and in pain, I can allow someone outside to touch me. Extensions of environments. That is, the more I make? see my outside and inside as similar, the more chance I have to survive. Am I anybody?

My mother told me I was nobody: I was less than a servant in the house. Everything my mother told me is wrong and I have to exert my will to pleasure as much as possible. If I exert my will-to-pleasure as much as possible, all I sense dream take in is me, since my outside and my inside are still separate, and I'm bored. If my outside and my inside are similar and I don't live alone, no; I'm confused about this question. I yell at my mother, "You're not fit to associate me."

The five events don't happen sequentially. One event happened continuously (#5: my mother's indifference); one event lasts for three weeks during my mother's indifference (#1: my being alone). Three events happen for a few hours or minutes each (#2: my brother tries to be nice to me; #3: I reject him (actually, since I've been rejecting my family especially since they shut me up, this event lasts as long as I'm alive); #4: he tries to make my mother hurt me), and happen during the time of my mother's indifference to me. Therefore these events didn't cause each other. Why

- [20] did I remember these events as sequential? (My perception of

time-relations is based on memory-patterns; how did I originally perceive and/or establish these memory-patterns?)

I'm split: I don't want to be alone all the time. I'm no longer a hermaphrodite. I'm no longer perfect. I have to adjust to this new environment-being: loneliness plus not wanting to be alone: I hate the people who have made me split. I've split and therefore I'm powerless: I don't know anything about the world outside me. I no longer trust my senses as knowing (that is, pleasure) tools; I'm deaf dumb blind. I'm not anyone.

Time is a ridiculous expression of, split from as expressions are splits from, feelings-events-thoughts. Time expresses causes-and-effects; causes-and-effects express more precise (real) changes.

No more of this abstract shit I know is abstract.

How else did they fuck me up?

November, December, and half of January passed away. Masturbate whip touch fuck. From every enjoyment I was excluded: I could watch my sisters, wrapped in emerald robes, descend into the unknown drawing-room, I could watch in the long shadows of the staircase, I could hear a medley of clatterings, whisperings, musics which I thought grew louder and louder. The dream is of loss. I'm standing on a moor, a long wide floor of dirt tiny dead shrubs and flowers the cold exhausts every nerve in within my body. My knees give way; I crouch into myself. In the distance I hear singing. A thin voice singing. A thin grey runs past my feet. I'm sitting in my room; the light (or the air) in the room's becoming redder and redder.

Since my feelings, my sensory perceptions, my fantasies, and my thinking are not distinct activities, therefore are language distinctions, therefore trained therefore controlled distinctions, my parents their society corrupted and/or made even my feelings. The

[21]

language I use is both cause and outcome (therefore evidence) of this control.

Fuck. Shit. Turd. Cunt. My nurse runs upstairs, a large dark woman, and starts yelling at me. She drags me to the soapstand, rubs my face hard with a damp cloth, the skin of my face burns, she tells me to go down to the breakfast room.

Language. How do I, fucked, use the language? I don't want to be doing this writing.

My mother, tall, black hair, green eyes, sits by the fireplace. 'Mother' is separated from 'sitting'; I build up so many thoughts about my mother, memory, I no longer see her as what she does. She becomes the God who controls me. Nothing's happening. My mother tells me what to do and I automatically do it, while I inside me hate her. I hate myself because I do what she says and I can't kill her. A straight narrow sable-clad, therefore rich, shape stands in the room with a grim face like a carved mask. Language doesn't map what is outside language; language predicts and makes what is outside language. They use language to pattern me.

The man doesn't talk to me because I don't exist, they haven't satisfactorily made me yet. The man talks to my mother about me.

"She is small and insignificant; what is her objective age?" ('Objective' separated from 'subjective'; that is, I don't really exist.)

[22] "Ten years old."

"She doesn't seem that old." (Because I'm not a person, a controlled, yet.)

The man turns like a robot to me.

"What's your name?"

My name's a word; it isn't me: I didn't give it to myself. They gave it to me to make me in their own image. "Kathy Alexander,

sir." He's 'sir' because I can't control him; I can't call him by a definitive name. I hate my name.

"Kathy Alexander, are you good?"

I can't say 'yes' because I haven't yet been properly trained (made), and I know it. When I was a baby I didn't know this; then my mother split me into inside-me and outside-me, I was a child because I knew I hadn't yet been properly trained.

My mother tells the truth: "She's a bad child."

"Come here", says the man. The man wants to fuck me so he can more easily gain control of me. He wants to further corrupt my sensory perceptions. The most extreme case of this would be making me pregnant.

"Kathy Alexander, " the man lays his hand on my shoulder, "you are a naughty little child." I'm not even important enough to be called evil. "Do you know what happens to naughty children?"

"They go to hell, sir."

"What is hell?"

"It's a pit of fire which is red."

"Do you want to fall into the pit and burn there forever?" That is, do I want to be passionate, strong, self-willed, or do I want to be a robot? [23]

"I want to be a robot, sir."

"How can you become a robot?"

"I can be sure I don't die." They won't kill me if I say everything they want me to say and if I do everything they want me to do. Then I'll become like them.

The man doesn't like this answer. "How can you be sure you don't die? Children die every day."

If I sigh, they say my sigh means I'm repenting, I don't want to be evil, I want to be them. Therefore they use any feeling

thought I show against me so I don't want even these feelings and thoughts: I want to be nothing, I want to die.

They want to make the inside-outside split permanent by making me think the thoughts and feelings inside me are evil. I should never express these thoughts and feelings. Then, I should never express these thoughts and feelings to myself. I should become a Christian.

"You must pray to God to change your heart: to take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

In this language objects become living beings and living beings become objects.

My mother thinks I've been talking too much. Language is therefore a tool, the most abstract form, my mother and this society have for fucking me over. Like 'time' and 'space', language corresponds to and makes the reality they want. Like writers.

[24] I've shown how this society makes people out of babies by corrupting/making the sensory perceptions, fantasies, and feelings of people by mentally splitting the people, then making the people think that abstractions, that is: lies, such as 'time' 'space' and 'language' either are or map the so-called outside world or reality.

I go crazy because I want to be a baby, not an adult, in this society.

All the birds fly around me bluejays cockateils parrots parakeets
robins grey sparrows brown sparrows minor birds owls barn owls
hawks vultures storks penguins ostriches emus albatrosses wood-
peckers magpies hummingbirds pigeons seagulls larks canaries
fantails.

Tiny spiders whirl past me whose legs brush each other like the
orange legs of starfish.

I live in a world of layers, delicate layers lying on top of each
other, lying on top of my eyes lips ears, nose, and nerves.

These layers are part of the lies that are within and outside me,
and are beautiful.

I have to get rid of any thing which is beautiful.

Thin fans like white wisps of the thickest cloth possible, long
glowing green and blue patterns within black lines like living
writhing snakes.

The trees branches forest spin with grey lace and twining
clouds.

Therefore, person doesn't exist, but place exists. Anybody can
call her him self and be Jane, Black; anybody can do what I do if
he she's in the same place the same time (meaning: change) etc.
as me. What precisely do I mean?

Five o'clock A.M. the 19th of January streaks of light falling
lowering through the black, feeling of newness, I don't know
where I am so I don't feel, narrow window diagonally above my
crib. I'm going to school: I'll never see my family again. I can't
consider this yet.

[26]

Discuss economics. How'm I writing this what's the position of
this economically in U.S.A. late 1973?

This country, as part of western world, as part of eastern world, is in crisis: all living beings might perish due to misbehaviour of human beings. Specifically: lack of knowledge about ourselves, fake difference between outside us and inside of us and we know nothing about either, we see the outside deteriorating we say “energy crisis” we don’t know what energy is. Specifically, since inside is outside and vice-versa, people are becoming insane. Specifically: I have no money, no prospects I can see of getting money at least for a year; given the growing lack of natural resources, that’s a lie, given the growing power-greed of a few rich men in this country etc., it is less and less likely anyone will want to help me eat because I’m interested in doing this work. If I become a secretary, I’ll kill myself because the only enjoyment I have is this work. Therefore I have to get money in some way that leaves me free and able to think write as much as possible. I have to get ATD Aid to the Totally Demented Demoralized a form of Welfare given to sickies and crazies. Since I’m not sick enough, I only have an ulcer a chronic case of PID and pinworms, I have to be crazy.

I’m now trying to train myself to get rid of unnecessary and harmful distinctions: physical/mental, within-the-mind/world. In order to get ATD I have to convince various fearful robots and maybe non-robots though still fearful I’m crazy. ‘Crazy’ means I’m not able to be a secretary or a factory worker or a prostitute. If

[27] I slit my wrists, they’ll put me in the loony-bin: so I can’t do that. In order to convince these people I’m crazy, since they see a lot of crazy people, I have to act, therefore since an event on any level, any thing, is real: become crazy. For the last two days I’ve been watching myself become more and more scared: split, drive the outside harder away from the inside so I can as much as possible escape a world in which I have to mentally and/or physically,

there's no difference, mutilate myself in order to live. I'm trying to get rid of the pain, and if I try to get rid of the pain by acting through my anger, which is what I want to do, I'll starve. No one will give me money for being angry. The American government will give me money for being either their robot or unable to act.

The economic terms underlying this work are that I have to mutilate myself in order to do this work. I have to get ATD (\$188. per month plus food stamps plus Medical). Already I don't have enough food to eat; and I keep not eating food, feeling my body eat itself until I'm a corpse, because I'm always at the edge of not having any food. At night the worms come out of the hole between my buttocks. I have to keep going and being angry. I become very scared when I know I can and I do separate physical completely from mental, separate my image from my sensory perceptions watch my image crouch in a corner, the walls turn red, I scream, I want to hurt myself: I bang my head against the sharp wood wall. What's the relation between what I perceive and patterns other people present me?

What are my purposes here? I'm completely selfish. I want to be able whenever I want to cover myself with this filthy meagre yellow blanket, to be alone and think. Eat until I'm no longer hungry. In order for these events to be possible, the world has to change. [28] That is, since outside is inside, my images of reality have to change. My tools for perception and action are language, time, and space. These phenomena are obviously tools, for they are neither real nor imaginary: they are ways I perceive and therefore predict my actions. Since I can physically act, the movement of my right hand becomes the movement of the pen in my hand becomes black lines changing the surface of this flat white object etc., these 'phenomena' are the ways in which I can change this world.

I use language, as a prediction system, prediction of every event since all events I know of are mediated through my consciousness (thus using time, space) to change this world. Since I live eat, depend on other people, this world is at least partially their world. All abstractions therefore are tools I use, and can use consciously, to perceive therefore to change. Perception (since physical and mental are equivalent) therefore is passive and/or active change. I'm not a mirror, there's no such thing as a mirror; I'm not objective.

Obviously I'm one person sitting on a bed in a fairly large room and I can't change every thing. I've no power over other people except insofar as they touch/use me. I don't have complete control over my own actions: (1) I've been too controlled by other people's language and other abstractions; (2) the world (in which) I live is brutal. I'm interested in my own pleasure. Since I touch (partly am) other people, what I'm doing here will somehow affect some people's actions.

[29] There's no difference between science and art: through perception (time, space, language), I try to change myself. I could say I have no self, but I have no wish to die. I can feel the red muscles of my cunt move and rub against my clit.

I hate all those who have made me want to die. I want nothing to do with the people who have controlled me. Begin again: when everything is still one, before I learn to walk or speak, I don't differentiate my sensory data: I don't differentiate my thoughts from what I see, smell, etc. I know how to speak; then I forget how to speak, I have to be taught. I move toward environments I want: perception is making. Since inside is outside, what I perceive I make and vice-versa: there's no distinction between the

imagination, sensorial perceptions, dream, action, therefore there's only perception.

I was first able to perceive chaos: both myths and histories, as language-predictions, are true. I guess I'm interested in the truth (hey David). If language, space, and time (durations) are mapping systems, they narrow the truth, therefore make lies. If they are prediction systems, they can possibly approach what is true. (?)

I'm becoming depressed: this book can't be interesting to anybody.

I'm a murderess and a criminal. My name is Dutch Schultz.

I basically only remember my mother. I remember every time she refused to speak to me "because she was too busy" she was talking to one of her numerous women friends; I remember her telling me I was worthless: I wasn't as good a human as Penelope, a small distorted girl my age who I despised. I didn't kiss her women friends enough; I made too much of myself. Children should be dead, not heard. I remember her then telling me she loved me: I was evil because I wouldn't kiss her in return. The husbands of her women friends would sit me on their laps, stick their hands in my lap; tell me I was an intelligent child. I remember I wanted to be alone as much as possible: I didn't want anyone to touch me or to touch anyone.

I take a long, slightly rusty butcher knife, and I think. My mother's standing before me, tall and stern. Straight, like a Puritan. Her lips and nails are bright red. She tells me I'm ugly. She wants to destroy me. She takes a long thin curved knife, the Arabian letter opener on my grandmother's business desk, and sticks it into my skin, just under the ribs of my left front. I feel the blade catch under my ribs, a pain just below my left lung.

I remember being very happy. What's the relation between my self and my perceiving? Obviously I can be anyone I want to be since 'anyone' is an identity, a particular set of images. I put my hand on someone's cheek: my right hand moves from my side
[31] upward and directly outward until it touches the cheek. More systematic: I want to begin again: I want to find out who and what my self is. All actions, whatever level of reality, I can remember

which were seemingly unmotivated (not socially motivated) came from my basic self.

There must be such a self, be it a non-limited self, because I'm neither a robot nor a machine. I'm no longer concerned with my mother and with my desire to murder her.

What childhood acts do I remember which were innocent (not socially controlled positive or negative)? (I'm supposing that a perceiver does the perceiving; an understander understands. There really may be no such subject/verb distinction.)

(1) Physical acts: I remember pissing whenever, wherever I was, I had to piss; shitting whenever, wherever I was, I had to shit; eating what I wanted to eat, (I hated milk: they had to take apart a camera so they could shove the milk down my throat when I wasn't looking. I hated cookies and sweets in general). I remember what I physically hated more than what I physically loved. I liked to stick my finger in my cunt, and smell my finger. Physical non-controlled acts are therefore not physical but sensual acts, and are 'mental' pleasures. My body is pleasure.

(2) I like to ring the door to my grandmother's apartment, walk into the hall of mirrors, tiny cold mirrors to which I press my lips. I like the thick cushions yellow on the yellow couch, which sink down, down, lower and lower until I roll in the thick white carpets, the white silk curtains which contain me. I like to sense these objects; objects are supposedly outside my mind; if I sense them, they're inside my mind. Therefore they're not objects, they're actions. Events. Events happen and are pleasurable, therefore the self might have no limits. [32]

(3) How do I perceive these events? I remember the black. Raw and chill, my nose hurt, my hands hurt, and I'm happy. The afternoon came on wet, and somewhat misty; as it waned into dusk, I

saw grey hills heave up round the horizon; as twilight deepened, I descend into a valley, dark with wood, and long after night has overclouded the prospect, I hear a wild rushing.

I'm confused.

A servant lets me into a building, many lighted windows: a passage, I suddenly see a huge fire, I warm my numb senses and limbs.

I remember liking to read, in fact, adoring my books. Sequencing (time, space, language). Should be pleasure and constantly flexible:

[POSTCARD TO J. MARTIN]

[front]

Dear John Martin,

*Thought you might enjoy seeing a section of my new work –
which work is now becoming an exploration of processes of memory:*

BREAKING THROUGH MEMORIES INTO DESIRE.

Also, my way of saying hello –

Love,

Kathy Acker-TBT

[back]

(3) How do I percieve these events? I remember the black. Raw and chill, my nose hurt, my hands hurt, and I'm happy. The afternoon came on wet, and somewhat misty; as it waned into dusk, I saw grey hills heave up round the horizon; as twilight deepened, I descend into a valley, dark with wood, and long after night has overclouded the prospect, I hear a wild rushing.

I'm confused.

A servant lets me into a building, many lighted windows: a passage, I suddenly see a huge fire, I warm my numb senses and limbs. I remember liking to read, in fact, adoring my books. Sequencing (time, space, language). Should be pleasure and constantly flexible:

2.

Therefore self-consciousness (-knowing) is not closed since names (i.e. "I" "me") are acts of memory, that kind of probable knowing. Other people don't really exist only insofar as I depend on

my rememberings. This society exists only insofar as I depend on
my rememberings. If I try to learn (remember) everything, will I
become everyone?

dedicated to the destruction of all memories and societies.

by including the memories of everyone in me.

1/31/74 love TBT

The text reproduced here is a 32-page typescript, archived at Duke University Libraries, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library – Kathy Acker Papers – Box 17 – Folder 11. (Manuscript versions of Breaking... exist in Box 3-Folder 10 and Box 3-Folder 11 at the Fales Library.)

The typescript is accompanied in the archives with a letter from Acker written on a home-made postcard to John Martin of Black Sparrow Press.¹ The letter is handwritten and is not dated, it probably is from early March 1974, after Acker traveled to New York. On the other side the postcard displays typed text: the last two paragraphs of First part of Breaking Through Memories into Desire with a new paragraph not featured in the sent excerpt. Below the typed text, Acker wrote the date: January 31, 1974. A similar postcard with the same typed text and the same handwritten date was sent to Bernadette Mayer on March 4, 1974. The typescript we transcribe here was probably sent along with the letter.

The typescript is partially numbered. The numbered pages are: 1-9, 11, 17, 19-20, 23-32. Acker's handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to the typescript's original pagination, or our pagination in the case of the pages that were not numbered in the original.

The text was probably written in San Francisco, in November 1973. Chris Kraus's guess is that it was likely meant to be the (unpublished) seventh installment of the Childlike Life of The Black Tarantula. Acker described this unpublished installment to Jackson Mac Low in January, as a pretty straight account of my life in November and December that would bore the shit out of anyone.² In December-January, with Conversations (cf. *infra*), she probably started to feel the potential of a new work. In January-February, Acker received a trust that her father had left in her name, marking a significant (if only emotional) re-appearance of him in her life. Maybe this unexpected reappearance precipitated the need to continue working on memory. The title was thus probably invented and added ca. February 20-25, 1974, when she started to write a third part.³ An alternative title or a sub-title was also given: I become Jane Eyre who rebelled against everyone. Sections of second and third part – the text here in this section is the first one – were sent to Alan Sondheim in late February 1974. Acker would have worked on this “exploration of process of memory” from November 1974 until the Various Memory Experiments I (April 1974) which seems to mark the end of the experimental project.

1. The envelope in the folder with the postcard, bearing Acker and Martin's addresses cannot possibly be the right envelope as it bears a stamp from October 16, 1972.

2. Cf. Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 99. — The quotation is from Kraus's book; the letter is archived in the Jackson Mac Low Papers – Mss 180 – Special Collections and Archives, UC San Diego Library.

3. That's what we can deduce from Acker's second letter to Sondheim: “I might change the title I want to” (cf. *infra*, p. 446); and from the first [*Untitled Tape 1*] where she says, talking about the text she wrote the day after arriving in San Francisco ca. Feb. 20-24, 1974: “decided to do a memory experiment [...] and I called this one breaking through memory to desire” (cf. *infra*, p. 480).

Notes:

368 So my feelings are definitely primary tools for my perceptions. *In the serial works, Acker has left the shorter poem form that we've been seeing, and has gone fully into longer prose works. They mark a breakthrough in the evolution of her style, as she moves away from the procedural exercises that play through the techniques and interests of her contemporaries and idols, and into a way of working that incorporates everything she's been doing: diary form, cut-up work, writing with and through other texts, manipulating codes of textual identification. Writer Rosemarie Waldrop talks about how she got into collage because she was hoping it would pull her out of her own voice and her own preoccupations. We've heard a similar story with Acker, in terms of her desire not to accept a singular poetic voice, and from Acker's friend and teacher David Antin, who describes how he encouraged students to get into textual appropriation as a way to access voices that aren't theirs. Waldrop writes:*

I turned to collage early, to get away from writing poems about my overwhelming mother. I felt I needed to do something "objective" that would get me out of myself. I took books off the shelf, selected maybe one word from every page or a phrase every tenth page, and tried to work it into structures. Some worked, some didn't. But when I looked at them a while later: they were still about my mother. (As Tristan Tzara would have predicted. His recipe for making a Dadaist poem by cutting up a newspaper article ends with: "The poem will resemble you.")

This was a revelation — and a liberation. I realized that subject matter is not something to worry about. Your concerns and obsessions will surface no matter what you do. This frees you to work on form, which is all one can work on consciously. For the rest, all you can do is try to keep your mind alive, your curiosity and ability to see.

Even more important was the second revelation: that any constraint stretches the imagination, pulls you into semantic fields different from the one you started with. For though the poems were still about my mother, something else was also beginning to happen.¹

Throughout her experiments Acker, like Waldrop, circles around unchanging content: her relationship with her mom, her abandonment by her dad, longing pushed up against the insufficiencies of romantic love, how work and economy influence the capacity to write and the material of writing. As Waldrop indicates, at some point she stopped worrying about modifying the content and focused on the form. With the serials it feels like Acker's found her ideal formal constraint, a structure for working for which her recurring preoccupations make formal sense, and that is simultaneously strong enough to "[pull] you into semantic fields different from the ones you started with." In Breaking

1. Rosemarie Waldrop, "Thinking of Follows," in *Moving Borders*, ed. Mary Margaret Sloan, *op. cit.*, p. 614-615.

Through Memories... childhood memory gets written through *Jane Eyre* and a procedural recall of fantasies, producing a “semantic field” in which the link between memory and touch is explored. How do we merge touch with writing? We’re getting close to the [*Untitled Tape 1*] (cf. infra), in which Acker will try to literally work through these questions of thought, fantasy, perception, memory, desire – swapping textual codes for an experiment with the visual, playing her preoccupations out on film instead of on paper. Foreshadowing: Fantasies are tools for my perception, not ends in themselves [...] I want to fuck one of the musicians the fantasy is the way I fuck him. Is this fantasy useless worthless (?) unless I really fuck him (I haven’t yet?) I.e. must fantasy necessarily be a tool? and we’re about to watch the car crash of two fantasies colliding as Acker tries to materialize fantasy into experience. [CF]

362 **BREAKING** *Breaking Through Memories into Desire* is the title of one of Acker’s most ambitious projects between 1971 and 1975. Acker’s concern for memory grew gradually since the beginning of 1973. The more she was writing long prose works the more she must have come to feel to what extent her sensations, emotions, and thoughts were determined by past experiences and context. She got interested with memory not as a means of direct access to the past but as a critical medium that should be interrogated as such, an imprint of one’s milieu and one’s community on the body-mind, and as a type of discourse which could be a decisive device in her deconstruction and reinvention of the “I”. She started to resort extensively to memory and its various registers in *Rip-off Red*, *Girl Detective* (which features autobiography-like parts concerning the narrator and Peter Peter) and in *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*. Around the fall of 1973 she used memory as a provocative confessional performance, talking on the radio show she hosted with Peter Gordon on KPOO about how she lost her virginity, which eventually led to Gordon being dismissed. With *Breaking...* the treatment of memory as capacity and as thought is radically more reflexive. We have found three existing segments of *Breaking Through Memories into Desire*, composed between November 1973 and March 1974, re-named probably ca. early March 1974 *I become Jane Eyre who rebelled against everyone*. It is very probable the work was intended as a much wider project. *Conversations*, from January 1974 (cf. infra), was probably intended as part of this same project. The experimental collaborative work intended with Alan Sondheim, based on recording (through writing, audio and video) all the details of their relationship and all their thoughts for each other, was also imagined by Acker as part of it. The two [*Untitled Tapes*] could thus be partly understood as surging out of Acker’s desire to make a piece which would crystallize the complex relations between her past, her memories, and her present method of relating to others physically and emotionally. In early March,¹ she would allude to this vast project as entitled *Kathy Alexander*, a title that very accurately conveys the problematic of the work: how much is her identity, her feeling of herself and of reality, determined by her family, her childhood, and more widely her non-chosen context. What was initiated by *Breaking...* comes abruptly to an end with

1. Cf. First letter to Alan Sondheim, ca. February 21-23, 1974, p. 442.

the somehow bizarre failure of the [Untitled Tapes] (cf. infra), and with the completion of the April 1974 Various Memory Experiments I.

What part of my simple physical perceptions've my parents family controlled and/or created? (cf. supra, p. 371); this question is First part of Breaking Through Memories into Desire's main problematic. It presupposes that perceptions of physical outside (or my physical perceptions) are socially politically controlled (cf. supra, p. 371);). Acker tries to remember how different authorities changed her way of perceiving as a baby, through teaching her to speak, act, distinguish in certain ways. The text isn't mainly concerned with knowledge and conditions of knowledge, as Conversations will be, but instead by sensitive experience, and one's capacity to take back control of one's mode of experiencing as well as the primitive pleasure attached to it. Sensations are at stake, and the way that we process them. The main control device implanted in language and denounced by Acker is the separation between inside and outside, "within-my-mind" from "without-my-mind": the knowledge that one cannot change the world induces refuge in this dualism. Moreover, within this paradigm, the sensation that the outside is a source of pleasure and that the self perceived as separated and alone is worth nothing becomes the ground for thinking that one could and should die — Acker often presents an extreme vision of life/denial, in which when one denies oneself what he/she wants he/she begins to die. Pulling herself out of this dualism, and uniting outside and inside thus means for Acker that one can recover and fully assume his/her desire and pleasure. Since 'physical' and 'mental' are the same realms (feelings, beings), sexual desire is desire to what? To touch and be touched therefore mentally to think. To touch my clit and come therefore to stop thinking: to simultaneously have complete power over and lose control willingly of myself. These definitions don't suffice. Nevertheless, obviously, as a child and now, I feel sexual desire to the extent that I can break clear of my perceptions which come from social controls. That is, all non-controlled thoughts, feelings, etc. are sexual. (Cf. supra, p. 377). This possibility of reaching non-controlled states is isolated in the whole text, the predominant impression it conveys is that the "I" speaking there feels split, powerless, exposed to others' power and thus inclined to keep herself "inside". If a break-in through the structure of experience isn't easily feasible ex nihilo, even through pleasure which is not less constructed than any other sensation, there is a relative possibility to alter one's and others' "world-picture" (Wittgenstein). Toward the end of the text the role of language as a means of control is underlined — which links this last part to Conversations — but it is consequently also presented as a medium through which it's possible to interfere with the socially existing system of judgments. Language doesn't map what is outside language: language predicts and makes what is outside language. They use language to pattern me. [...] Like 'time' and 'space', language corresponds to and makes the reality they want. Like writers. (Cf. supra, p. 381, 383). Her vocation as writer gains, with these considerations, a new sense. A writer should make real— through first changing her subjective images — what she believes is the truth in order to substitute the existing channels of beliefs.

366 I kiss my books Parallel passage in I Dreamt I Became a Nympho-

maniac! :Imagining: I cared more for the books than anyone else and would kiss my books good-night when I went to sleep.¹

386 world has to change This sentence echoes the epigraph of *I Dreamt I Was a Nymphomaniac: Imagining*: “This is very nonpolitical, therefore reactionary,” he said./ “But what would the world have to be like for these events to exist?” I replied. The two first parts of *I Dreamt I Was...* – “Desire begins” and “I find an object for my desire” could have been composed around the time Acker was writing *Breaking Through...* if we didn’t know that the 1st installment of the serial was actually published and sent in the beginning of July 1974,² so about 6 months after this text. It’s possible, then, that she pulled from *Breaking Through...* to start writing the serial.

392 John Martin John Martin was the founder of Black Sparrow Press.

1. *I Dreamt I Became a Nymphomaniac! :Imagining*, Kathy Acker, feat. in *Portrait of an Eye*, Three Novels, Grove Press, 1998, p. 96.

2. Cf. Letter from Barbara Baracks to Kathy Acker, July 10, 1974; archived at David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library (Duke University) – Kathy Acker Papers – Box 30, folder 5.

Part II of:

[Breaking Through Memories into Desire]

Diary II

I become Jane Eyre who rebelled against everyone.

(sent to alan sondheim ca. february 24-28, 1974)

kathy acker
the black tarantula

(ca. 1/1974)

- [33] Alan- can't type this all at once cause I type so slowly so will send it as diary or whatever, that time relation, in a series of letters as I get it typed, older stuff will be sent next letter, I have to pick it up (the xerox) from friend)

Title changed to- DIARY II

PART II. *I become Jane Eyre who rebelled*
1. *against everyone.*

TBT

Peter I love you this writing has to be always with me I go outward and outward starting now unsure scared not sure what I'm doing; I just tried to commit suicide: I slice open the skin of my left wrist and face with a razor blade I had taken a week before from Gil's house, the razor was too dull; the next day I knotted a black scarf around a light fixture, Peter walked in as I was adjusting the scarf and calmed me, I feel my nerves each one is raw every perception means pain I'm in constant pain a friend once said I feel like a dentist's drill everywhere on me no anaesthetic. This writing feels slightly painful to me now. I learned when the black spots hit, which seemed to coincide with my exhaustion, to wait and to remind myself they would pass. Everytime I waited, the constant pain I felt slowly disappeared. I refused to write and to think about my work. I learned that my thoughts could become so thick, when mass accumulates and accumulates mass forms a 'black hole', ~~therefore~~ thoughts accumulate. (No difference therefore between energy and mass), I couldn't exist. I should not act because acting meant trying to hurt kill myself; I should wait. I now want to find out who's controlling me economically and why. In the largest terms: Nixon the oil companies is money international? is Nixon a pawn or a kingsman? down to the way my parents control me by being rich, giving me no money but offering

to pay for a trip to New York etc. under “certain conditions.” How the school I go to, the “home”, is run. I feel I’m going through a forest a thick forest blue black with low plants around the trees I want to be more alive and happier, am scared what I’m doing here.

Remember. I’d like to frame this kind of writing with other kinds of writing like:

““O.K. kid,” Mr. A says, “you’d better clear the case and soon.”

For the first time, I’m on my own and scared. I have to find out who”

or:

[34]

“I remember walking through the gates creaking and swaying with the wind,” (romantic bullshit business) so this writing’d be enjoyable. I can tell you everything about me straight: you won’t be bored:

About three weeks ago I became uncontrollably (unbearably) exhausted and depressed, tried to commit suicide. How serious the desire I’m not sure since I didn’t succeed all I remember is black: I now feel about that period black: incredibly thick dense blackness. Therefore I think I felt that thick blackness. I didn’t think; when I started to think, all I could do was try to hurt myself kill myself. It was an automatic action. I had no sense sensation that I existed. I was completely apart. Above all, I had to stop thinking, but I couldn’t stop thinking. I was then in complete pain at the moment I could begin (again) to perceive temporally (temporality). I needed someone to help me because I no longer knew what to do except to kill myself. I no longer existed.

Periods of absolute blackness alternate with periods of nerve-rav pain: thus: the temporality. I can feel pain, I. I still exist in separate pieces. The pain becomes worse and worse; at first I sort

of fight it, but I'm scared to return to nonexistence so I let the pain take over. I have some sense of myself as long as I'm alone.

I learn to wait when I jolt downwards; remember to wait calm during the pain. I send my parents a letter in which I say I know they've been forging my name to stock dividends; they had better turn over the stocks to me.

Writing and sending this letter makes me happy. I know my parents have been forging my names to dividend checks; I'm not sure whether they're withholding other of my money from me or how much money's involved. Today I find out the stocks are worth approximately one hundred dollars I have a \$250. trust fund.

[35] (I'm going to write about myself, not about Jane Eyre, because I'm interested if I know anything. How I know what I think I know; what kinds of things I can possibly know. (JANE EYRE, p.26)

I can only write about myself (therefore two me's). No : using language is perceiving (functional). Loosen up, laugh, or I'll go crazy again.)

When I awoke, I found that everyone I knew was dead. I'm going to try to depend on myself, that is is there any self to depend on get information from, that is do I know anything, using only my self for information, not JANE EYRE.

Sight: I see an oval shape, wider than it is long. If I move my eyes, the shape seems to turn to both sides to that I see about two-third's of the inside of a sphere, (the inside surface of a non-perfect sphere). I see this area composed of different colors: recurring small patterns of black, brown-red, light green, white, a yellow area, a grey-white area inside of which is a black rectangle: these last two areas smaller than the area of various recurring colors. This is the right-quarter of the inside sphere-like area.

Therefore I identify different objects according to breaks in the recurring or non-varying colors. That is, the monotone yellow area is a different object from the recurring brown-red, green, white, black area. Sometimes the areas I see are rectangles, circles, etc. Sometimes they're wierd (that is, no-name-for) shape. This might not be true because I distinguish different objects basically according to memories (involving the other sense-data).

When I see the yellow, or the large orange rectangle in front of me, I know I'm seeing. The orange rectangle isn't an object but a relationship: it's my seeing and so is me? an extension of me? part of me? I see regardless of any education, any parental societal shit I've recieved.

At the same time as I see, the soles of my feet touch a hard surface, my ass feels a soft surface, the fingers of my right hand feel a smooth hard surface; I hear voices which I recognize of Peter and his friend, muffled noises to my left; I don't smell anything I can name (is sensing then dependent on language-using, on memory-recognitions?); I taste a slight sourness of the juices in my mouth. A constant succession, no, appearance in no order or succession, or relatings.

[36]

These relatings occur because, not necessarily 'because' but certainly 'as', I know they occur: therefore my seeing involves my consciousness. Or, am I conscious necessarily that I'm seeing what I see, (two events)?

Do I know anything beyond these relatings (seeing, smelling, hearing, touching, tasting)?

Desire (love) makes me move against authority, that is makes me move.

O.K. a problem: either my seeing is my consciousness of seeing, or I see and I'm conscious of my seeing. If the latter is true,

only my consciousness might be ground; but then, since every thing I see (every action) on acid is as real as everything I see (every action) when I'm not on acid, my seeing is as ground as my consciousness of seeing, as is what I see granting that what I see exists, as far as I can know, only as my seeing. This has been said over and over, not by me. Who the hell cares?

Another problem: why do I care what's true? I want to find out what I know. Why? So I can live as long as possible and as pleasurable so I can find out if I want to live as long as possible. I don't want to die. I'm hungry. I don't like being cold. I like to come. I want to sit on a warm bed, read and write, read stuff people write to me. How do I know these things?

[37] Seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, hearing (equal to or part of my knowing) exist. Already said. That is, I know I know, (a single act; the language here is not narrative. I'm hungry. I feel pain just under my left ribs, if I breathe hard that spot especially hurts, and the juices in my intestines/stomach feel? taste? sour. Therefore "hungry". A physical sensation, an emotion-desire, a word: all connected. Therefore: what? I not only connect (sense); I desire. My desiring connects to/is part of my sensing connects to/is part of my consciousness. I now want: food, warmth, be alone on this bed, have Peter near me but not bothering me, hear minimum sound, find what I know (as much as possible), not become frenzied, not become so despondent again I shatter, get mail tomorrow, get money god knows somehow, for pleasure. I also love, hate, fear, find amusing, desire Be more specific:

All these actions (phenomena) are knowing. Wanting to know is knowing; therefore when I know perceive, I want to know perceive. Why do I write for other people?

Obviously my knowing (i.e. consciousness, I prefer to use the

verb) isn't the only phenomenon that exists. I sense and desire myself and others. Do I absolutely know anything else besides knowing (kinds of knowing)? No, since knowing is connecting and being.

I huddle into the black corner, on my bed. I no longer see realize the bed; I look outward: to my right, a round yellow shadow in the multitudinous black shadows, my head the bones of my head are small and delicate: large brown eyes, a pointed nose, I look outward into the dark. The two of us, I and Peter, huddle together like animals. Our arms around each other. I don't dare move. The walls around me are shifting grey-blacks.

I walk into the countryside a thick black wool cowl around my head. Endless gusts of wind sweep past me, not at me but past me, swirling the low dense bushes and the swamp-like weeds. I remember walking into the countryside a thick black wool cowl around my head. I remember endless gusts of wind sweeping past me, swirling the low dense bushes and the swamp-like weeds. [38] what else do I remember? (Thinking of Elly Antin)

I remember in my mind I saw myself walking into the countryside. In-my-mind as opposed to seeing (that is, outside-my-mind). How precisely is this a false distinction, (if it is)?

When I was a child, about 8 or 10 years old, my parents on weekends during the winter used to rent a car, an Impala, no that might have been later, and take me, my sister on a picnic. They'd drive into Westchester north (?) of New York, turn off the freeway, up some narrow road until they found an area of woods where the undergrowth permitted humans. Once they found a tiny peninsula, a round land surrounded by water, dark trees and swamp. This is all, that is happens completely, now inside my mind. Happens as I relate it. My memories of my actions are as real to

me, and therefore as real, as my memories of my feelings, dreams, fantasies, memories, etc. Obviously. I'm getting nowhere.

I see myself walking in the country. Either I know this is a memory as opposed to a fantasy, dream, vision; or I know I'm walking in the country and I have no way of really distinguishing between my fantasies, dreams, memories of memories, actions. Therefore there would be no real difference, as far as I'm concerned, between my fantasies, dreams, memories of memories, actions. No. I sense (know). I remember (know). I remember what I sense? I have no way of knowing that's true. I see I smell I touch I hear; all present without sequence. I sense (simultaneously know; am). Remembering I order. My remembering is my using making?, as much as sensing is making it's acting and relating I know is part of my relating, time. Therefore as far as I know, my remembering has the same truth-value for me as my sensing. (I didn't expect this.)

[39] I'm walking slowly into the purple and grey countryside. I see a blue and red telephone in front of to the left of me. I say 'normally' that the telephone is more real than the countryside. Rather I'm distinguishing between my different modes of perception. At this point I don't know to what extent these distinctions (of knowing) were/are learned.

2.

My sensuality:

All the above statements come from are my reasonings-in-language, that is my language. Are my (using) language. What if

I try (using) the language to communicate other ways I percieve?
Are there other ways?

That is, do I percieve apart from using language, and can I relate using language what I know (outside of having been and being taught) outside language?

Outside description as if I am someone else: (Language becomes me?)

(1) The fingers of my left hand pick up a piece of paper, open away from the paper: the paper falls. (2) The fingers of my left hand pick up a piece of paper, open away from the paper: the paper falls. I see the flat-folded blue-lined *white* paper against dirty yellow blanket, now see pink-white fingers above and under paper, thumb above, other fingers under: against yellow blanket; black shadow (black, same shape as fingers-and-paper only totally black) slowly appears to right of and above fingers-and-paper until I see almost entirely only the black shape in the middle of the yellow blanket. Simultaneously my fingers feel nothing, then a smooth flat surface slightly cool, tensions in my wrist and lower arm. As suddenly my fingers no longer feel smooth surface now warm, black shape on blanket slowly disappears. To my right, partly on blanket partly off blanket, I see paper. (3) Same except black shape on blanket doesn't

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The text reproduced here is a 7-page typescript, bound along with Acker's last letter to Alan Sondheim. The lines on the first page: "Alan, I can't type this all at once [...]" are in red ink in the typescript that we transcribed, suggesting that this copy was made especially for Alan (no other typescript copy is known so far). The text is named "Part II" and seems to be a direct continuation of First part of Breaking Through Memories into Desire (cf. supra). Its pagination, running from 33 to 39, corresponds directly with the last page of First part of Breaking... which stops at 32. A change in the text's title was also suggested on this typescript, Acker hand-wrote in black ink "Diary II / I become Jane Eyre who rebelled against everyone".

The transcription was made from a digital copy.

Acker's handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to the typescript's original pagination.

This text was probably composed soon after First part of Breaking Through Memories into Desire and before Acker started corresponding with Sondheim. Until late February 1974 (when Acker sent it to Sondheim) it is very likely that this text existed only in manuscript form. Until Acker typed it up, it didn't have a title either, and was only a continuation of what maybe had been intended as a seventh installment for the Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula (cf. supra). The title "Diary II" was intended to distinguish the text from the 1971 Section from DIARY which she also sent along to Sondheim. Looking again to the red type at the beginning of the document, this is only one part of a longer text which she didn't have time to copy. We chose to date it ca. January 1974 because of the allusions to her suicide attempt and to the discovery of her father's trust.

Notes:

400 Alan- This paragraph for Alan Sondheim was typed in red ink.

402 \$250 This "trust fund" more or less corresponds to what Chris Kraus describes as "some stocks and a small trust set up in her name by her biological father a number of years before", and that Kathy had just discovered. "It was as if, by writing about her disappeared father as the Black Tarantula, she'd conjured him. Together, the funds amounted to about \$350 (\$1,950 in today's money), but they'd been withheld from her for years by her parents. When she threatened to sue them, they agreed to release the funds and, 'under certain conditions,' pay for a trip to New York. [...] As she was going to read with some friends at the Poetry Project on February 18, she accepted her parent's offer. Early that month, she flew to New York. It was during this trip that she met the artist Alan Sondheim".¹ In a letter to Alan Sondheim, (cf. p. 448), Kathy Acker confirmed that the trust fund amounted to \$300 and it was thanks to this money she could

1. Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 92.

fly to New York in February. When she received the money, maybe when she was in New York, she learned her biological father's real name for the first time.

407 that is, do I perceive apart from using language and can I relate using language what I know (outside of having been and been taught) outside language? *Breaking Through Memories Into Desire...* builds on the circulatory system of what Lyn Hejinian calls the open text, and which I've been trying to read through Acker as a model of a libidinal economy, a structure of circulation and organization that merges environment with desire, social history with that mutative potential of want (cf. *supra*, notes on *Politics*). I keep returning to Rosemarie Waldrop's essay "Thinking of Follows," because Waldrop's move toward longer poetic structures mirrors Acker's, and the *Breaking* project, as one that frames the serial texts, stands out as a central moment in Acker's transition from shorter to longer form. Reading with Waldrop, we can interpret the move to longer form as an investment in a circulatory economy, which matches up with the libidinal project Acker is inventing. As Waldrop writes:

The tension of line and sentence. But especially the sentence. Erosion of their borders. Sliding them together, toward a larger (total?) connectedness. [...] Consciously I was pushing at the boundaries of the sentence. I was interested in having a flow of a quasi-unending sentence play against the short lines that determine the rhythm. So, on one level, I was simply exacerbating the tension between sentence and line that is there in verse. And since the thematic field was cars and other circulation systems (blood, breath, sex, economics, language, a set of metaphors never stated, but made structural) I liked the effect of hurtling down main clause highway at breakneck speed [...] After a while, though, I began to long for subordinate clauses, complex sentences. So I turned to writing prose poems. I became fascinated by Wittgenstein and by the form of the proposition because of its extreme closure. This was a challenge because my previous poems had mostly worked toward opening the boundaries of the sentence, either by sliding sentences together or by fragmentation. I tried to work with this challenge, accept the complete sentence (most of the time) and try to subvert its closure and logic from the inside, by constantly sliding between frames of reference. I especially brought the female body in and set into play the old gender archetypes of logic and mind being "male," whereas "female" designates the illogical: emotion, body, matter. Again, I hope the constant sliding challenges these categories.¹

The longer form allows Acker to slide the circulatory system of the line (which Waldrop describes in total new materialist terms, merging body, environment, and economic context) into the longer field of the paragraph. In this project, the tension comes from the contradiction, on the level of the paragraph, between seeming narrative form (borrowed,

1. Rosemarie Waldrop, "Thinking of Follows," in *Moving Borders*, ed. Mary Margaret Sloan, *op. cit.*, p. 612-613.

too, from the overarching reference to Jane Eyre) and sentences describing sensation and physical memory that work to pull the reader out of narrative. Waldrop describes playing off of this kind of tension to question archetypes of gender and logic; in her exchange with Alan Sontheim, Acker is also trying to manipulate or transform the archetypes. With her, we ask: can the afab body feel and remember without being reduced to mere material? Can mathematical logic be converted into sexual fantasy? Does masculinity hold all claim to logic? [CF]

Conversations

kathy acker
the black tarantula

(1/1974)

CONVERSATIONS

The Black Tarantula

1/1974 -

[2] INTERVIEW WITH DAVID ANTIN. 12/28/73.

- I'd like to talk to you about your ideas concerning uses of language since that's what, one issue, your current work (TALKING) seems to concern.

D - O.K. If I assume that my thinking is, or one way of my thinking is, my using language, I can examine my perceiving (including my perceptions), that is my thinking, by examining my uses of language. For instance: examining the problem of certainty: I say "I know that..." rather than "I'm certain" in situations in which there's no doubt. How does this "I know that..." function? How does "I know that..." function regarding truth values? "I know I'm lecherous" doesn't mean that you, TBT, know that I'm lecherous. "I know I'm lecherous" means I know I'm lecherous.

- How could you then possibly prove to me that you're really lecherous?

D - Let's go back:

"I know" often means "I have proper grounds for my statement." That is, "I know I'm lecherous because I'm now acting lecherously". That is, you would understand "I know I'm lecherous" to be true, because you understand how that statement relates to the specific non-language contexts involved. You'd understand the language-game.

- What if I don't trust my sense perceiving?

D - That's an entirely different problem.

- So poetry, any sort of writing, is a prime way of percieving reality?

[3]

D - The problem of certainty again.

Certainty is, as it were, a tone of voice in which I declare how things are, but you can't infer from the tone of voice that I'm justified.

For instance, you say you want to fuck me. I believe you want to fuck me because I believe you're a trustworthy person. If you add that you know you want to fuck me, the know simply informs me you're sure of your belief.

- Do you care whether you can know I want to fuck you?

D - Only for practical reasons. Actually (specifically): not at all.

Doubt too gradually loses its sense. Since I can doubt only what I know. That is: everything descriptive is part of logic.

- Therefore, society is not an absolute. Right?

D - What I'm basically talking about is use.. Garbage is what is no longer usable, or taken as usable. Poetic language is that language which is most functionally efficient. Newspaper language. Advertising language. I'm interested in what statements (what language) I can use as foundations for further research and actions.

- It's not then the so-called 'truth' value of a statement a poem, to return to our first argument, that matters; but what practical effects the poem contains leads to.

[4] D- In other words, a preconception of 'use' is 'social': no one talks to him/herself.

Why would what I say be of any use to anyone? Why would anyone believe what I say?

- Does "be of use" presuppose "belief"?

D- If President Nixon said to me "I'm your mother", I'd believe him unless I remembered otherwise or had been told otherwise. I still might believe him (or her). Therefore I distinguish the truth or falsity of statements against my inherited background.

Therefore: truth and falsity don't exist. Except in regard to use: I can use real money: (I can use counterfeit money, but in a different way.)

- What I know, you must know, everyone knows.

D- But is there anything I definitely know? Anyway I can tell you convincingly I know this event?

All truth-falsity testing, as I've said, takes place in context, in an existing system of beliefs. But doubting and knowing depend on, lie within this system. That is, I use judgements as principles of judgements.

How, actually, do I judge?

- Learning. I learn to distinguish, to perceive something, that is to perceive order from chaos; I learn to speak. I'm being taught and controlled at basic levels.

D- What do you mean by "learning"? Don't I learn from my

experiences?

No. I'm taught judgements and their connections with other judgements. I'm not taught single judgements: I'm taught, I've been taught, a totality of judgements.

[5]

- How can I attack this system, try to determine my living? Really see. (Through delight?)

D- The child learns by believing the adult. (Doubt presupposes belief).

- But I sometimes doubt because of certain experiences I've had.

D- Not all propositions are equally subject to testing? Is the whole system of beliefs subject?

- The difficulty, first, is to realize the groundlessness of our believing.

D- O.K. Do I know outside of this system of beliefs?

I act with complete certainty. But this certainty is my own. Certain knowing, then, either isn't possible, or has nothing to do with social living as I know it, with the system of learning and judging.

The Black Tarantula, 1974. part of long piece

(Taken from ON CERTAINTY, Wittgenstein, and self.)

All love to David.

The text reproduced here is a 5-page typescript, archived at Duke University Libraries, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library – Kathy Acker Papers – Writings – Other writings – Box 22 – Folder 13.

The typescript is accompanied by another 4-page typescript entitled “from I DREAMT I WAS A NYMPHOMANIAC! :IMAGINING”, an excerpt from the eponymous serial self-published by Acker in 1974. In this text she reflects on repetition and its metaphysical aspects, repetition being the distinctive formal device she uses in *I Dreamt I was....*¹

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to the typescript’s original pagination.

Conversations was very probably written in San Francisco or Solana Beach, in January 1974, after Acker had interviewed David Antin on December 28, 1973. It may have been intended as a part of not-yet-named *Breaking Through Memories into Desire*; the information that the text here is “part of a long piece”, and the similarity of concerns and themes between the two works supports this.

Conversations was published under the title “INTERVIEW WITH DAVID ANTIN. 12 / 28 / 73” in *The World*, #29, April 1974, editor: Anne Waldman, pub. at The Poetry Project (St. Mark’s Church In-the-Bowery, 10th Street & Second Avenue, New York City 10003), p. 58-59. Kathy Acker signed with her name and not as “The Black Tarantula”. The published version is identical to the typescript, except for some spelling corrections and this sentence that was cut from the published version: **Therefore I distinguish the truth or falsity of statements against my inherited background.**

Notes:

412 CONVERSATIONS Georgina Colby briefly discusses this text in *Kathy Acker: Writing the Impossible*² seeing it as proof that “Acker’s writing practice was accompanied by a clear engagement with philosophy”. Misquoting the sentence in the text: “Taken from ON CERTAINTY [...]”, Colby infers that *Conversations* was a section excerpted from a work that Acker had entitled “On Certainty, Wittgenstein and Self”. Obviously, here “ON CERTAINTY” refers to Wittgenstein’s notes compiled and published in 1969 as *On Certainty*, translated and edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Moreover, here, the “Taken from” means that Wittgenstein’s book served as source text for the writing as much as Acker’s own “self” — which is the role that “taken from” serves every time that it appears in *The Childlike Life....*, at the end of each segment. Indeed, much of the speech by both Antin and Acker is literally drawn from Wittgenstein’s book, making it a montage of quotes and seemingly spontaneous dialogue. The word “Conversations” is thus plural, because this could be the synthesis of various conversations between Acker and Antin but also because there are several layers of conversations, from between Wittgenstein’s book, Acker, Antin, and their readings.

The use of the dialogue as a form is significant at this stage of Acker’s work. It reveals a

1. It corresponds to p. 135-138 of *I Dreamt I Became a Nymphomaniac! :Imagining*, Kathy Acker, feat. in *Portrait of an Eye, Three Novels*, Grove Press, 1998.

2. G. Colby, *Kathy Acker: Writing the Impossible*, Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2016, p. 9-11.

new interest in the performatic aspect of language, which has been developing since she's been living again on the West Coast (we can see this interest, for example, in her creation of radio shows with Gordon and Ashley on KPOO or KPFA – cf. *infra*, p. 431 – and also in her distaste for the classic “readings” that she used to do in New York, voicing her preference now for a more “performative” format). The use of dialogue also indicates her wish to distance herself from the diary formats, and from “personal” writing in general. It shows her intention to experiment, in the vein of Burroughs or the chance operations music, what it's like to compose through collaboration in real time with another person, instead of the individual collaboration produced between reader and text alone. Moreover, in the vein of work by David Antin, Robert Ashley, and Peter Gordon, she probably wanted to try out, herself, what a minimalist approach to literary material could produce. She conceived of this “minimalization” process as the transcription of spoken language (“talking”), and hoped that this practice would allow her to explore language beyond the separation of mediums. She was interested in the questions: how can two people communicate and understand, or misunderstand one another? How does this minimization can diminish the separation between art and life?¹ Finally, the format of the “interview” was embedded in her wider interest in plagiarism, montage, and making fiction out of other's people words; as Lotringer said, interviews are just text [...] It's like plagiarism without plagiarism².

Three months later she would express in her first letter to Alan Sondheim the desire to push her dialogue experiments even further: I thought we could send each other as much information about ourselves as possible in all ways possible, not only then via tape, written, video, but also overwriting, redoing (as in the TARANTULAS) etc. establishing complicated feedback relations. [...] it gives me a chance to explore how two people get to each other. Thus transcending involving in itself as part of itself diary so I'm not stuck there. Better even than the TARANTULAS because more

1. This interest for “talking” was shared by other authors contemporary to Kathy Acker at the time, like Bernadette Mayer and like Barbara Baracks, who wrote to Acker: “What I'd like to do is tape my conversation, ordinary conversation, and see if it sounds as good later as it felt at the time when I was saying it. Then transcribe the conversation onto the page and see how that takes. What, then, is the percentage of reduction of interest, thru each of those chances [...] of medium (from present event, to tape, to written word). A lot of the anxieties of my life, I suspect, are molded around those distinctions among mediums; I don't think I've completely accepted the essential differences among them. The result being that I treat my friends as if they were literary objects, or treat my writing too casually. My next big purchase will be a tape recorder (bought a reflex camera, a Canon TLB, which I'm learning a lot from now, a couple months ago), to follow this up.” (Letter from Barbara Baracks to Kathy Acker, September 18, 1974; sent from 225 East 5th St. Apt. 5D, New York – NY 10003; archived at David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University – Kathy Acker Papers – Box 30, folder 5).

2. Interview of Acker by Sylvère Lotringer (“Devoured by Myths”), unexpurgated transcript, 1989-1990, in Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Melville House, 2018, p. 92-93.

of an equal conversation.¹ [...] but more important I want to tape conversations with you, do the stuff with you because I still feel this is a literary situation.²

413 "I know" often *This is a partial quote and paraphrase from §18 of On Certainty: "I know" often means: I have the proper grounds for my statement. So if the other person is acquainted with the language-game, he would admit that I know. The other, if he is acquainted with the language-game, must be able to imagine how one may know something of the kind.*³

414 Certainty is, *This is a quote from §30 of On Certainty: Certainty is as it were a tone of voice in which one declares how things are, but one does not infer from the tone of voice that one is justified.*⁴

414 research and actions *This is an allusion to §87 of On Certainty: Can't an assertoric sentence, which was capable of functioning as an hypothesis, also be used as a foundation for research and action? I.e. can't it simply be isolated from doubt, though not according to any explicit rule? It simply gets assumed as a truism, never called in question, perhaps not even ever formulated.*⁵

415 What I know *This is a paraphrase from §100 of On Certainty: The truths which Moore says he knows, are such as, roughly speaking, all of us know, if he knows them.*⁶

416 No. I'm taught *This is a montage from quotes and paraphrase of §140 and §143 of On Certainty: We do not learn the practice of making empirical judgments by learning rules: we are taught judgments and their connexion with other judgments. A totality of judgments is made plausible to us. [...] It is not single axioms that strike me as obvious, it is a system which consequences and premises give one another mutual support.*⁷

416 How can I attack *Acker's question is the most central proposition in this text; it marks a harsh contrast with Wittgensteinian reflexions and somehow reveals that this is less a dialogue (even less a "Socratic" one as Colby coins it) than a misunderstanding or a confrontation. While David only resorts to On Certainty's vocabulary, Acker's language seems to draw more from Burroughs's. Moreover while Wittgenstein's perspective is a pragmatic interpretation of logic, Acker with her question pulls the discussion towards a biopolitical interpretation of the matter (I'm being taught and controlled at basic levels). As David cannot give answers to the Black Tarantula's preoccupations, Conversations points toward the incapacity of Wittgenstein's skepticism to satisfy the desire of breaking through biopolitical control. Instead of talking of "doubt",*

1. First letter to Alan Sondheim, ca. February 21-23, 1974, cf. *infra*, p. 442

2. Second letter to Alan Sondheim, ca. February 24-28, 1974, cf. *infra*, p. 446

3. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell (Oxford), 1969, p. 4e.

4. *On Certainty*, ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell (Oxford), 1969, p. 6e.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 13e.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 15e.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 21e.

which is the only way Wittgenstein considers in *On Certainty* to put the “system” in question, Acker adopts a more aggressive stance: the structure needs to be attacked for one to be able to self-determine and “really see” with a deconstructed perception. As a matter of fact, the “system” isn’t for Acker a necessary fossilization of judgments through habit, it isn’t so objective/impersonal a process, nor is it such an absolutely immanent element – The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life¹ –, it is rather a socio-economic-medical-logical scheme arising from will to power. Thus violent resistance is appropriate. But what are Acker’s chances against Antin’s arguments? Can one actually alter the system? For Wittgenstein, “doubt about existence” (what if I don’t trust my sense perceptions?) “only works in a language-game”², which means a real doubt about a judgement fundamental to the language-game cannot have any meaning in the context it aims to question, because in that case it would lead to no effects or consequences. The system would have to change as a whole to actually experience any alteration, and this change would provoke change in concepts and in the meanings of words. Such an evolution is dependent on a historical-natural process, the metaphor Wittgenstein uses to describe it is geological: It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid.³ Fluidity nevertheless is only very relative and logic remains thus quite a stable science: And the bank of that river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited.⁴ Only a historical-natural catastrophe (overturning: καταστροφή) could provoke a significant shift, since circumstances/context is what holds fast a system of beliefs. Individual agency is infinitesimal here. Wittgenstein imagines at least two modes of being that would involve doubts about beliefs structural in one’s life: the skeptic and the insane. A skeptic is someone who accompanies all his beliefs with doubt, which doubt would thus bear no consequences at all; instead of saying “it will” he would say “it’s very likely”: Imagine someone who is supposed to fetch a friend from the railway station and doesn’t simply look the train up in the time-table and go to the station at the right time, but says: “I have no belief that the train will really arrive, but I will go to the station all the same.” He does everything that the normal person does, but accompanies it with doubts or with self-annoyance, etc.⁵ On the other hand, someone who really questions the fundamentals of one system (and in that case in spite of one’s wishes as he can’t understand those fundamentals as such) is considered by those

1. *On Certainty*, ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell (Oxford), 1969, §105, p. 16c.

2. *Ibid.*, §24, p. 5c.

3. *Ibid.*, §96, p. 15c.

4. *Ibid.*, §99, p. 15c.

5. *Ibid.*, §339, p. 43c.

who believe in them as insane — The reasonable man does *not* have certain doubts.¹ Someone insane is thus just relatively insane, insanity is a systemic alien; if certainty is a form of life², he lives in a different fashion according to his own principles. Wittgenstein, then, doesn't recognize any form of disruption of the system, there is only superficial doubt that bears no consequences and radical difference with which it is impossible to communicate. A system evolves organically (hierarchy between judgments changes), a system doesn't break. One is closed in a system and cannot make a way out. Wittgenstein doesn't consider the possibility of one sharing part and not all of the grounds of a system with others, of one alternatively remembering and forgetting his grounds, of one passing from a system into another or of one destroying his own grounds... life consists in my being content to accept many things³, refusal to believe and accept would go against life. Is it even possible to refuse? can I be in doubt at will?⁴ Is it in my power what I believe?⁵ Refusal as doubt or contradiction would make no sense. As all beliefs are in the end absolutely ungrounded they cannot be removed through any logical mean, groundlessness is not logical it is pragmatical: the end is not an ungrounded presupposition: it is an ungrounded way of acting.⁶ Any logical system is thus inscribed directly in individual life, therefore resistance to the system is to be accomplished with life itself. This could mean at least three things inside *On Certainty's* philosophical frame: 1) to dis-organize one's body in order to alter one's capacity to understand beliefs and in order to reach a non-systematic form of living — it would thus be a negative approach to the problem, to resign logic in order to break out of one system; 2) change forcibly one's behavior and actions, and assimilate, through long-term exposure to another community and language, other grounds and their logic. The idea is that these new grounds will be more in-line with one's desire (a version of desire which would then be altered through the process); 3) stimulate one's body in such way as to temporarily access other modes of thinking less grounded on beliefs, working rather through active association and imagination. One problem here that is particularly relevant to a writer, is being understood by one's social community. Acker's main recourse in her early works, instead of real self-determination and real systemic break-out, which, from Wittgenstein's structural point of view would be impossible, has been to count on the readers' good faith and on bad faith's potential. Acker manipulated the "tone" and the grammar particular to certainty and knowledge, doing this in such a way as to convincingly cast doubt on all usual proofs while simultaneously alluding to the system's limits and contingency; moreover, she adopted the way of life marked by the "opprobrium" reserved for liars⁷ — the only way to live

1. *On Certainty*, ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell (Oxford), 1969, §220, p. 29e.

2. *Ibid.*, §358, p. 46e.

3. *Ibid.*, §344, p. 44e.

4. *Ibid.*, §221, p. 29e.

5. *Ibid.*, §173, p. 25e.

6. *Ibid.*, §110, p. 17e.

7. "Isn't it the purpose of construing a word like 'know' analogously to 'believe' that then opprobrium attaches to the statement 'I know' if the person who makes it is wrong?/ As a result a mistake becomes something forbidden." (*Ibid.*, §367, p. 47e).

which fully assumes the groundlessness of our beliefs –, and she was transparent about doing it. Those are the non lethal weapons available to the writer in Wittgenstein's frame. A method to play the game upside down.

Conversations can thus be considered as a minimal exercise to indicate where to look for weapons in tight structural domination. The interviewer's lack of understanding reminds us of the role of the §315's stubborn schoolboy in *On Certitude* asking questions to his teacher which put the uniformity of nature at stake; about the schoolboy Wittgenstein concludes: He has not learned to look for things. And in the same way this pupil has not learned how to ask questions. He has not learned *the* game that we are trying to teach him.¹

416 (Through delight?) This question resounds with one statement in *Breaking Through Memories into Desire*: I feel sexual desire to the extent that I can break clear of my perceptions which come from social controls. That is, all non-controlled thoughts, feelings, etc. are sexual.²

416 The child learns This is an almost exact quote from §160 of *On Certainty*: The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes after belief.³

416 Not all propositions This is a quote from §162 of *On Certainty*: I have a world-picture. Is it true or false? Above all it is the substratum of all my enquiring and asserting. The propositions describing it are not all equally subject to testing.⁴

416 D- Not all propositions are equally subject to testing? Is the whole system of beliefs suspect? / - The difficulty, first, is to realize the groundlessness of our believing. / D- O.K. Do I know outside of this system of beliefs? Acker's work is deeply relational, based on affection and a desire to interact with texts and their authors. We can think about her relation with Antin as framing much of her work, since he's been there since basically the beginning, first as a teacher then as mentor and friend. These questions of perception through relation don't stop here. Maybe both sex and writing are always about measuring the exact place where one's perception is unique. Then trying to push unique perception to its total limits, so that perception is converted into "wonder," a word that Acker often uses to designate the desired yet unknown. A scene of perception, desire and relation that is played out in Acker's emails to McKenzie Wark:

Just read this over breakfast: I too am returning from Zirma: my memory includes dirigibles flying in all directions, at window level; streets of shops where tattoos are drawn on sailors' skin; underground trains crammed with obese women suffering from the humidity. My traveling companions, on the other hand, swear they saw only one dirigible hovering among the

1. *On Certainty*, ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell (Oxford), 1969, §315, p. 40c.

2. *Breaking Through Memories into Desire*, cf. *supra*, p. 377.

3. *On Certainty*, ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell (Oxford), 1969, p. 23c.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 24c.

city's spires, only one tattoo artist arranging needles and inks and pierced patterns on his bench, only one fat woman fanning herself on a train platform. Memory is redundant: it repeats signs so that the city can begin to exist.

Every time you dream I am fucking you, this is what happens.¹

Fucking and writing transform perception into material; it performs the repetitive work of bringing into being, "so that the city can begin to exist." In the conversation in this section Acker is obviously not having sex with Antin but we witness the intimacy and tenderness of friendship and mutual admiration, the generative work of exchange in which perception is shared. [CF]

416 The difficulty, first This is a quote from §166 of *On Certainty*: The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing.²

1. Kathy Acker and McKenzie Wark, *I'm Very Into You*, op. cit., p. 135.

2. *On Certainty*, ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell (Oxford), 1969, p. 24e.

Talking as music

peter gordon
interviewed by loren means

(pub. 2/1974)

TALKING AS MUSIC

by Lorens Means

The last time I went to see Peter Gordon perform at Mills College, I expected to see him play his saxophone with tape delay. But after about twenty minutes of trial and error, it became obvious that the delay was not going to work that day, so Peter played one of his tape pieces instead.

The piece consisted of Peter explaining why he hadn't written the chamber piece he had planned, and turned into a local pornographic bookstore. The piece ended with cassette tape recordings of Peter trying to cope with his bosses. It was one of the most entertaining pieces of music I've heard at Mills, but not a note of music was sounded.

Recently I ran into Peter again, and he told me about the new piece he's working on for the Mills concert February 23. It's to be called "The Affair," and will probably consist of Peter and a friend of his discussing their love affairs, some conversations with Robert Sheff (otherwise known as "Blue" Gene Tyranny), and some monolog commentary by Peter. It occurred to me that it might be considered bizarre to call such activity music. But Peter had an explanation ready:

"I call it music because I'm a would write it down it would probably be called poetry. But basically if you want you could just call it talking, because that's all I'm doing.

"For a while I thought there was a definite distinction, whether you're going to be really into structured. In 'The Affair' I made the decision that all the conversations would be about affairs or relationships, whether they're my friends' or mine, or talking about someone else. That inherently is a very structured experience.

"So rather than taking that and translating it into musical forms,

which I did in my strong trio — it was a very notey piece but all the musical parameters were based upon the interpersonal relationships which are found in Cocteau's novel *Les Enfants Terribles* — in this case, that translation is not made. It's being presented directly. In that sense it's very much a minimalization of the musical material. I'm really presenting the actual basic structural material of these relationships, and also the way one recounts them, the ways one sees them..."

Now mind you, Peter isn't some wild-eyed young upstart from nowhere. He's got a degree from the University of California at San Diego, and he's studied with such notable New Music heavies as Kenneth Gaburo, Pauline Oliveros and Robert Ashley. I asked him how he got into doing his "talking pieces," and this was his reply:

"It initially started out when I was writing this string trio, and I seemed to recall, hearing the piece and reading the score, everything that was going on with me while I was writing it. And that seemed to be just as much a part of the piece as anything in the piece. And I thought, 'why am I writing all these notes, when all that other stuff is going on, and the other stuff is what's on my mind?'

"So I did a piece in which I went into the studio — this was in San Diego — and set up a patch on the Buchla synthesizer and did a real-time composition in which I talked about my family — very impromptu talking, at the same time I was playing the piece. So the phrases and the ideas would sometimes manifest themselves, mostly in the musical portion, the electronic sounds, and sometimes more in the verbal portions."

Suddenly I got the drift that doing a piece like this could be a frightening enterprise. Peter agreed:

"When you're an artist of any sort, immediately you're in a very vulnerable position sociologically. It's incredible that pretty much all

the other people in this country do what they do and they get paid for what they do, and that's that. But usually when you're an artist, you do what you do and then you have to do something else, work or teach or something like that just to survive.

"So when you're talking to someone who isn't an artist, it's almost as though you have to apologize, especially if you're not into a commercial type of endeavor, which most people into New Music aren't. You don't have objects you can sell, you don't have stuff which people can dance to or even play on the radio.

"Then when you do your piece, you put so much into it that you're really presenting yourself. With the talking pieces you're going even one step further – not only are you doing a piece, but you're up there also. You personally are the object d'art. You're what the material is'

And has Peter ever had audiences reject his talking pieces? You bet he has:

"A friend of mine played the Buchla piece – 'Monologs and Monodies,' it was called – in a number of places in England and Europe. And people started getting really upset, especially in England. They said, 'I feel like I'm in a room with an exhibitionist. One should not say that sort of thing in public.'

"I was initially talking about my family. My brother who had just almost gotten kicked out of Berkeley because he spent all his tuition money on pinball machines. And then I started talking about sex, and how people should do what they wanted to do, and what they felt they had to do. I was espousing a very-much-watered-down anarchist position – I was very much into Bakunin at the time, and that was very much on my mind.

"It really wasn't all that personal – I started saying that people should masturbate in junior high school, that people should be taught

to appreciate themselves early, like different ways of masterbating and getting off. You could experiment with friends of your own sex and with friends of a different sex, and with strangers of your own sex and strangers of a different sex, and just let it go spiralling.

“But I don’t think they objected to any particular thing, but rather to the fact that I was sitting there talking to them. I was talking to strangers.

“And I also got really criticized by people in London, like Cornelius Cardew and the Maoists. They really objected to the political content of it. Right now they’re very much down on American music and composers because it’s not ‘the Revolution’. ‘The Revolution’ being the Maoist revolution. And you can’t be an anarchist and be a Maoist, right? They’re really down on John Cage because his music supposedly espouses a theory in which everyone is like atoms wandering aimlessly, and what we need is solidarity. So they discarded my work because they didn’t like the content of it.”

Talking about rejection lead naturally to talking of KPOO, the supposedly “fun”, “alternative” radio station I recently disassociated myself from shortly after I was unable to prevent the staff from throwing Peter off the air.

“This work I’m doing now also came out of what I was doing on KPOO. I would have composers and artists on the show, and the Black Tarantula and I would have the people talk about themselves. Occasionally we’d throw in a piece, but the piece would be incidental to the artist. The identity we presented was that here was the composer and here were the pieces, but they were really one and the same, and what he says is just as important as what he puts in his music.

“There wasn’t a frame-structure saying ‘this is a piece and this is not a piece; this is the music and this is not the music.’ And we were talking about ourselves, very honestly and very personally, which

is generally something that you don't find on the media, especially from the person who does the show.

"One of the things that got the staff very upset was the fact that the Black Tarantula related how she lost her virginity. That's material you can't say on the radio. According to the FCC, you can't even allude to sex on the radio, even in a double-entendre.

"Initially the staff of KPOO told us we could do anything we wanted to, but they must have had very limited imaginations or a very limited concept of what one could do on radio. Right away they started limiting us, step by step, and then when we played a talking piece by Bob Ashley, they decided it was 'boring' and had no place on KPOO.

"They would never give us guidelines as to what they wanted – they just kept limiting us and then telling us to use our own judgment. Politically it wasn't even fascist – I think it sort of epitomizes the whole liberal mentality. It was very repressive and very demeaning.

"I was told I could do anything I wanted to do, so I experimented and took the show very seriously. But then David Glanz said to me, 'I've heard a rumor that you're trying to expand the limits of radio, and if that's the case there's no place for you on KPOO.' I don't think there are any limits to radio."

So Peter continues to expand the limits of musical composition with his talking pieces. He'll be presenting "The Affair" Saturday, February 23, at 8 pm in the Mills College concert hall. Also on the program will be "a rock type of piece" by Craig Hazen; a piece by Paul Robinson "for prepared piano and percussion, based on some texts by Beckett;" and "a conceptual piece" by Jill Kroesen.

It's a freebie, and it should be heavy, and honest.

This interview was published in the *Berkeley Barb*, vol. 19, no. 6, issue 445, February 22-28, 1974; pub. by Berkeley (2042 University Ave., Berkeley, CA. 94704).

This interview offers a unique window into the Sunday-afternoon radio show Kathy Acker and Peter Gordon started hosting in the late summer-early fall 1973 on San Francisco KPOO 86.5 FM, "Poor people's radio". Where "friends such as Robert Ashley and Terry Riley stopped by to perform and do interviews; Acker read from the Marquis de Sade while Gordon played records by the Les Six composer Arthur Honegger."¹ This interview also reveals clear and interesting intersections between Acker's and Gordon's work, as well as with Robert Ashley's and David Antin's, to cite only these two.

In addition to their KPOO show, Gordon, Acker and Ashley also created the *Hi Art* show on KPFA. "We would pre-record conversations of the three of us, and then during the live show we would talk, take telephone calls from listeners, while I'd mix in multiple layers of conversation. The result being multiple voices in casual, often personal, conversation, asynchronous and synchronous simultaneously. And with Kathy, of course, there was no filter — for one show, she was making comments about an ex-lover, who would then call in to respond, and they'd have it out, on live radio as other conversations would waft in and out. We did this for a few months, but then we got a letter from the program director complaining that we were expressing ideas and opinions on things that we lacked expertise and the show didn't convey a sense of authority, which, of course, was the point of the show. This was, I should point out, long before the days of reality TV and talk radio. And we had listeners who would call in and talk about anything they wanted, which seemed quite liberating for the times."²

Notes:

426 TALKING AS MUSIC Kathy Acker is 26 and she's dating Peter Gordon who's in a band. This is the phase when Gordon's band Butch Whacks and the Glass Packs were touring, Chris Kraus writes that the band was "in demand as openers for such major bands as Boz Scaggs and the Doobie Brothers".³ She's been writing a lot about music and about trying to arrange her cut-up material as music. We saw this on an obvious level with *Gold Songs for Jimi Hendrix*. But another way that music composition is bleeding into the text is in textual repetition, which often has an overlooked sonic quality. The second installment of Acker's serial *I Dreamt I Was a Nymphomaniac* (1974) consists of a two-page passage repeated four times. At the beginning of the segment, before getting into the first of the four identical passages, she writes, I want to make something beautiful: an old-fashioned wish. To do this I must first accomplish four tasks, for the last one I must die: Then I'll have something beautiful, and can fuck

1. Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 88.

2. Peter Gordon, email to the editor, July 7, 2019.

3. Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, op. cit.

the men I want to fuck because they'll want to fuck me.' *The musical refrain fuses with ritual. When the compositional practice of refrain is lifted by Acker from music and put into read text, it works to highlight the preoccupation that she is working on right now: what is the gap between fantasy and reality, between ritual and cause? Can writing shape the world?* [CF]

1. Kathy Acker, *I Dreamt I was a Nymphomaniac: Imagining*, op. cit., p. 101-109.

Section from: Part III of long work
Breaking Through Memories into Desire

(sent to alan sondheim ca. february 24-28, 1974)

kathy acker
the black tarantula

(2/1974)

Section from: Part III of long work

BREAKING THROUGH MEMORIES INTO DESIRE

How close can I get to someone? Will we become each other?
concerning my friendship with Alan Sondheim.

3/1

Being human is boring and difficult who wants to be human
all the time I'm sick of being rational doing things right I'm be-
coming a cat. I sit in the bathtub first Rich comes over afternoon
1:30 wakes me up we fuck 2 2 ½ times (he doesn't' come the third
time because Peter calls he's coming home we don't have time

I know who Alan is: Alan is my father. He'd better be my
perfect father: take care of me but not restrain me doing anything
I want, touch me softly with his hands and voice, like everything I
do. If Alan isn't my perfect father, I'll turn away from him, unless
he touches me again. I'll attack him really hard tear him. I'll make
him shrivel into nothing. I have to think about myself, be alone
without lovers so I can think about myself: Alan helps me. He
tells me since Rich and Peter like each other, no problem. I have
to forget what (other) people tell me.

Myself. Alan helps me: that's who Alan is. There must be a
new language. I can write by myself when I'm by myself. TBT-
How can anyone go from outside-in: understand what is outside
except through him/her self? Can only, I say, go from inside-out.
A- But I am nothing; the universe is everything. I have to figure
out how the universe works. TBT- I don't understand who I am,

the act of percieving. TBT & A- If there is no difference between inside-the-mind and and outside-the-mind, there is only the percieving events; these approaches understandings are coequal.

Alan,

[2]

Alan, I don't understand a lot of what you write. You understand everything I write. I understand you when you talk to me and I feel wonderful: I feel simultaneously like we're twins who are actually touching fingers joined to fingers, and you're protecting me; you have your arms around me your right hand on my hair. But I'm not angry at you feel you're taking my power away. I don't have to be a mother to you as I have to be to most people I know. I don't want that, not now, I don't want parents I don't want anything, forests, but Alan's hand on me, I want to know what's happening.

Hear drops of rain fall against surfaces, to my left, my sapphire, white, silver shawl wrapped around me blankets over my red-brown dress. I keep remembering.

The text reproduced here is a 2-page typescript, bound along with Acker's letters to Alan Sondheim. The text is named "Part III of long work *BREAKING THROUGH MEMORIES INTO DESIRE*" and thus continues the two earlier parts of *Breaking...*

Transcription was made from a digital copy.

Acker's handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to the typescript's original pagination.

This text was composed between February 21-23 and February 28, 1974, and sent to Alan Sondheim. It's the last part of *Breaking Through Memories into Desire*, but it's likely the first of the three parts to be given this title (Acker hand-wrote the title on the two earlier works at the same time that she titled this one). Even if it's the third and last part, we believe Acker's letters to Alan Sondheim, as well as the two *[Untitled Tape 1]* should be considered extensions of *Breaking...* and hypothetical parts of a larger work. Indeed, at that point it seemed Acker envisioned *Breaking...* as a "book" entitled *Kathy Alexander*, and into which she was hoping to integrate a piece made in collaboration with Alan Sondheim.¹ This text is therefore the link between the works related to memory that were done before, and those done after the February trip to New York. This text is also, in some ways, the first contribution toward the collaborative project that Acker and Sondheim had together. It's this letter that Alan Sondheim reads in the March 1974 *[Untitled Tape 1]*, and it's Acker's description of this text that opens the tape: at that point my work was into doing various rather strange memory experiments and I called this one breaking through memory to desire I was trying to find out what the structures or structure of intentions were behind my remembering so I started writing down everything that I had heard about Alan or heard about his work or knew about him before I met him we've many friends in common and some of my friends had told me a lot about his work and I had seen some of it and I thought this could be a fairly humm boring rehearsal of facts so that I could see somewhat so called objectively what the structures what my desires were which under-layed the narrative of this facts and I ended up with a very strong emotional passage which I sent to Alan².

Notes:

434 Section from: Part III of long work *It's exciting to have this piece, Breaking Through Memories...* because it won't ever be published. As a technical work it's located between the serial texts and the longer book projects, right before a major shift in Acker's practice and interests. Acker says that she loses interest in the problematic of identity after the serial; criticism focusing on her work often divides it into four main

1. "Thinking on plane yesterday of piece I wanted to do (1) with you (2) as part of KATHY ALEXANDER (book); wrote down 'How close can I get to someone? Will we become each other? concerning my friendship with Alan Sondheim.'" (First letter to Alan Sondheim, cf. *infra*, p. 442).

2. Cf. *infra*, p. 480.

phases, which the scholar Spencer Dew both describes and tries to complicate in his book *Learning for Revolution*. Dew writes about the categorizations of Acker's work:

Another critical tendency in regard to approaching Acker's œuvre is to follow Acker's own comments on her work in applying a chronological framework in speaking of "periods" to her work. In such an approach, the first phase consists of experiments with identity via pirated autobiography. In her earliest works, Acker focused on the subjective "I" as something shifting, temporal, and fragmentary. Acker's second phase is characterized by assaultive, "deconstructive" work wherein appropriated texts are critiqued for their inherent advancements of capitalist or patriarchal ideology. The third phase is, supposedly, devoted to a constructive search for an acceptable mythology on which to found a new society, and the final phase of work, with Acker battling cancer and facing death, is said to engage most deeply in "language of the body." While there is some value to these demarcations (much of Acker's work for instance, addresses "identity" in a way that her late novels simply do not), this interpretive framework must be held, at best, loosely. The membrane of Acker's œuvre is porous.¹

Along with Dew we've seen how Acker's earliest experiments, which actually come before the "first phase" go against this interpretation, working through questions of deconstruction and generation on the level of existing poetic form. And I want to complicate this a little further, by reading this text/exchange with Sondheim as a crucial piece of evidence between the serial (identity) works and the longer (deconstructive) works – importantly, Acker's preoccupation in this phase isn't identity or deconstruction, but touch, perception, and relation. In this unpublished serial she's writing to and around "Alan," cultivating a form of textual communication that is based on an exploration of actual relationship vs. fantasy. The tension between the two is the electrical surge that lets her access her memories and analyze her perceptions.

In a 1990 article the scholar Martina Sciolino describes Acker's creation of a relational subject that builds on the narrative innovations of Gertrude Stein. Sciolino is focusing on *Great Expectations* which would technically be part of the "second period," the "deconstructive phase" of Acker's production – but the creation of this same type of relational subject is also obvious in *Breaking Through Memories...* Sciolino describes the relational subject:

For instance, Acker imagines a relational subject through narrative experimentation, as does Gertrude Stein. [...] But in Gertrude Stein's *America*, Stein appears to propose a rather Utopian text that proceeds without any linkage – in fact without any subject, without a speaker, without a reference. "Language should move, 'not just moving in relation to anything, not moving in relationship

1. Spencer Dew, *Learning for Revolution: The Work of Kathy Acker*, San Diego: Hyperbole Books, 2011, p. 21-22.

to itself but just moving” (Stein). Because this line is offered in the indeterminate frame of quotation marks, it would be a mistake to take it as an autotelic word. Similarly interested in the possibilities of writing a moving text, Acker’s Great Expectations speculates a narrative subtle enough to express the state of being in between states [...] A narrative moves because a character is a work-in-progress: engaged in a ceaseless process of negotiation self-hood through relations to the world, to time, to other characters. Thus, the difference that constitutes identity is contingent — interrelational and contextual. In a word, that difference is moving, as moving as the subject who desires.¹

The interplay between the text of Breaking Through Memories, the letters to Alan Sondheim, the integration of the letters into the text and of the text into the letters, and finally Acker’s experimentations of the text in the context of her videotaped sexual encounter with Sondheim in [Untitled Tape 1] build an Acker-version of this moving subject. Desire is the thread that connects the fantasies and perceptions, sexual desire is the vector of movement that directs the “character-in-progress.” [CF]

434 How close This sentence, as Acker tells Alan Sondheim, was written on the plane, probably ca. February 20-22, while she was on her way back to San Francisco. She had gone to New York to give a reading on February 18 at the St. Mark’s Poetry Project.

1. Martina Sciolino, “Kathy Acker and the Postmodern Subject of Feminism,” *College English* 52.4, 1990, p. 443.

[Letters to Alan Sondheim]

kathy acker
the black tarantula

(2-3/1974)

Dear Alan,

Hope this reaches you. Thinking on plane yesterday of piece I wanted to do (1) with you (2) as part of KATHY ALEXANDER (book); wrote down "How close can I get to someone? Will we become each other? concerning my friendship with Alan Sondheim." The last statement of course being dependent on your agreeing wanting to work with me: I thought we could send each other as much information about ourselves as possible in all ways possible, not only then via tape, written, video, but also overwriting, redoing (as in the TARANTULAS) etc. establishing complicated feedback relations. This would be interesting, at least to me, in the following ways (I can think of now):

- (1) it gives me a chance to explore how two people get to each other. Thus transcending involving in itself as part of itself diary so I'm not stuck there. Better even than the TARANTULAS because more of an equal conversation.
- (2) I like (don't know what word to use here but I'm sure it's completely understandable) you; this gives me opportunity to be with you. Also find it hard to keep up with people who are outside my work and/or daily life and so this *working would* include everything, solve all problems.
- (3) Various aspects of our what? knowing each other totally stun me: mainly ways in which we're alike, fantasies we have had about each other why I can't tell; i.e. I don't understand what's happening and that fascinates me.
- (4) I've never seen the intimacy Vito explores in his work explored in a real way as an occurrence between two people (i.e. two people involved both as subjects and objects) and this fascinates me: I see it, the exploration, as an incredibly strong piece.
- (5) in your work, you explore more systematically than I do plus

[2] you what? know stuff I don't so I could learn from you, my work needs that, and I think your work could also profit from the intimate sexual (I mean this word in a general sense) concerns of my working.

Please tell me what you think: would you like to collaborate and, if so, what ideas? I thought think I want immediately to document all fantasies I've had about you everything I've felt thought about you prior to and up to now meeting you, all thoughts I had have about you (first, because I'm fascinated, second because this would establish immediate feedback complications for structural exploration) and also an account of my thoughts (fantasies dreams etc.) as background → video of my daily etc. I'm not sure about this but I don't want communication to get so narrow and looped no approach to reality exists, and also as I read your stuff do a TARANTULA on it (since that's how I read carefully).

These are quick beginnings ideas.

Please excuse: I'm a bit fanatical about working, and can never think of anything to say otherwise unless I chatter which I do constantly. Am I imposing on you in any way? Will Xerox up old stuff for you in a few days when I can get to Berkeley and send it off. Mainly stuff written during a part of my life I now hate and fear, so can't even read the crap to edit it, I'm scared of it. So it might be horrible (include POLITICS). Only now interested in my current working/thinking. Though ideas as I remember them still interest me: (putting down everything in my consciousness blah blah no they don't.)

Being in California and not New York is very wierd because I still (probably will always) think of New York as my home but the loneliness here should make me work even harder. Tell Beth hello

the little I got to talk to her I like her very much. Am excited by this piece hope you are interested/ you have ideas what you want to do with me.

Love TBT

[3] Dear Alan,

Got your package today and started reading, the 1968 ode first to get idea of where you're coming from, very different in a way than where I started (though both "avant-garde" so to — vomit) so sending you some early stuff of mine the diary which is actually hundreds of pages, my attempt to map at that time my total present consciousness, I can't bear to read so have never edited even reread but probably contains info about me (stuff I for one don't want to know) also for your amusement a really early work, I'll just type up one of the series where I was interested in various language ambiguities but I might as well give you some history of me (most of the early stuff (from before 4 5 years ago) I've thrown out. O my god, my ulcer's killing me. O.K. I'm back. More important, since I'm not so sick today as yesterday (boy was I out of it when I spoke to you on phone yesterday I was running 102 or something, totally nauseous did I say anything frightening?) so starting to type up rest of novel and stuff I'm doing re you which I want to get to you because I need feedback. Considering nature of project. I mean I'm no goddamn N.Y. artist and I don't write business letters so well mainly because I can't seem to get away from myself, and who the hell am I hustling anyway no money anywhere what do I care la la la, Jesus you hardly know me how the hell are you ever going to handle understand my sense of humor I'm probably turning no whatever making you hate me, well: I can't separate this insane project I'm doing with you and all my other desires, I mean (this connects to travelling business, just business-business which I'll get to every all events are so connected help) would you like to sleep with me, (Gil calls he wants to do still the movie (DEEP TARANTULA) o no there's the phone

again) (it's Alan you O.K. so most of this material has been said, should I destroy this letter I have more to say:)
Start again. Jesus how come I feel so close to you? Not about that.
The new material :

The new material I'm sending you : (Terry just called :

[4]

Albuquerque's for the last week of April, date unset as of yet, what letter this is totally interrupted speech) first part of material is the second part of whatever (I might change the title I want to) the new thing, second part (the stuff concerning you) is third part of the monster which looks like:

- (1) my memories of Alan before I meet him
- (2) my memories of Alan when/after I meet him.
- (3) my feelings now about Alan
- (4) events happening between/concerning Alan and me

but more important I want to tape conversations with you, do the stuff with you because I still feel this is a literary situation, I can't get out of the words, I'm straining (especially feel inadequacies after listening today to SLEEP Acconci's piece, I also wrote down this questionnaire last night :

What do I feel about Alan?

What do I feel for Alan?

What do I think are Alan's main characteristics?

What do I think Alan's doing in his work?

How do I feel Alan's work is changing me?

How do I feel this work (concerned with Alan) is changing me?

Do I love Alan (totally stupid ridiculous question but I refuse to take it out)?

I guess I'm straining at the bit, looking for a situation of working that isn't as private as this kind of (me) writing: to make private public *break thru barriers break thru* also make the working

situation that way. But events don't happen fast enough. I keep sneezing now: no concentration. But still stay that personal. Anyhow. I'm probably being too open but I feel underneath minor seeming plastic fear and embarrassment totally relaxed and close to you. Like talking to you on phone, I couldn't think of what to say because you seemed to be speaking my words. I mean whatever the obvious dissimilarities fuck that spelling the similarities are strong & strange. So why not say whatever I feel we both *know* (some of) the parameters. — Love TBT

realize personal stuff in this letter, as I quickly reread I think, is insane, I hardly know you, an exploration of fantasy-perception, fantasy-perception-perceiving as equal in validity to other ways of perceiving? I find this fascinating (I keep apologizing for what I'm saying)

Alan: to continue this letter next day after I speak to you on phone, this letter's looking like a diary: I don't know what to say. I now feel completely scared. I feel completely scared. I'm just going to give you a lot of information here about me some of which might have nothing to do with nothing UNDERSTAND I CAN'T TELL ANYMORE WHAT HAS TO DO WITH WHAT WHERE THE SO UNDERSTOOD STABLE BOUNDARIES ARE I feel I have to explain to you as much as possible. God if this keeps up, by the time I get to N.Y. we'll both be dead exhausted doing something else. Just give you quick general all information. I really feel scared and jittery. I mean we're too like each other it's too difficult when I think about becoming you putting my hands under your skin and touching you I can understand (I can do anything if I think of it as art or work isn't that repulsive!) but thinking about talking to you about what? fantasies of our living together: that totally freaks me out. I'm sorry: I just feel really scared. How to explain myself, my mother never wanted me and made that clear, that instability, I didn't know who my father was until about 2 weeks ago (I learned his name when I got this \$300. trust fund owed to me for years which enabled me to go to N.Y.) at the same time felt something for me, I mean there must have been some reason why I totally adored her (and still do tho I will never acting admit this) anyhow I started fucking when I was at that time (still 'double-standard') young, at 13, because it was a way of getting some love (I'm trying to set down some of my attitudes those developments) I was at time going to an all-girls' school and all girls' camp, I was extremely bright competitive and crazy felt I was & know others felt me to be the strange one the brilliant one. This sense strong for me. Couldn't tell anyone I was fucking except the guys I was involved with who I felt closer to

[5]

than my girl friends because I had to lie to them. Felt all the time I was living a spy story lies within lies on top of lies my mother is a fabulous liar, for instance she doesn't bother to tell believable lies because she realizes once I know she's lying I can't call her bluff it doesn't matter. I adored my books and felt closest to them, I felt happiest being by myself and reading. (Do you want all this information?) (god Phil just called up the Guernica's been defaced how wonderful I'll be back). The guys I hung around with in high school were all extremely rich; we kept talking about how we could be as cynical and sophisticated as possible (obviously I'm give this info so briefly it's not worth too much I don't know what to do. anyhow this re my sense of humor also somewhat my sense of sexual relations). At same time I met P. Adams and bunch of filmmakers like Jonas Mekas and Barbara who was living with him who I bobbed around with. I went to Brandeis flipped out all I wanted to do was write flipping out had mainly to do with life-death struggle with my mother I decided to live fuck her, then got married to Acker (who's now a commie organizer, not really, he's a negotiator for AFL-CIOO) when just 19 because I wanted to go with Acker to California to UCSD since Marcuse was now there and couldn't get scholarship to keep going to school any other way. I was simultaneously real insecure and real sure of myself – this still true, romantic and not-romantic, whatever, having to deal with extremes all the time and only beginning to be able to do it. So I put myself in position of being monogamous being married spending most of my time with one person which I wasn't able to cope with at all. Which is why I distrust romanticism as any basis for more than an affair, I adored Acker, as youngsters at that age just go woow into things with little sense of self other than self-against-mother and writing (my only real

sense of self for long time and it didn't work: we got so close to each other we became crazy Acker the last year we were together (3 years in all) (plus year at first living together) would sit in bed day after day dealing out poker hands wouldn't see anyone but me kicked everyone out of the house who came to visit either or the both of us. I was completely faithful to Acker for whole time. When I told him I had to split, by this time I had interests outside of this bed-poker scene and couldn't handle his constant putting me down for my interests, he flipped out, only got together about a year later. His flipping out, almost committed suicide, totally scared me because I really loved him and I decided never to go through a similar scene again. I started living with this other guy Lenny (he was at the reading, a lot of people you know know him) who I didn't really like but I figured I didn't want to live alone and I didn't again want to live with someone I loved because that obviously didn't work out. That part of my life, some of which is really awful like we moved to N.Y. I knew only Jerry Rothenberg in N.Y. thru David (Antin) who wasn't yet back from the country, I had no money and never been apart from a university atmosphere that security even tho by this time I totally hated the university became sick with this abdominal infection acute P.I.D. (like a severe gonorrhea but not gotten in the same way) which was mistreated so it became chronic was constantly scared I'd die no one to turn to for help so worked making dirty movies then in sex show with and without Lenny he wouldn't help me at all in fact nagged me to fuck him to fuck I was in such pain I'd have to take synthetic opium which was the one thing the clinic gave out freely finally went to decent wonderful doctor who helped me get well again and Lenny finally got job I unemployment anyhow this part of life in the early writing I'm

[7]

sending next letter so I needn't repeat it's pretty awful especially the shock of going from a really protective environment to a totally frightening environment. Gradually I made some friends in N.Y. this about 1972 some people started noticing my work. (I feel calmer now.) At this time I could hardly relate to men at all, didn't sleep with any men besides Lenny who I didn't want to sleep with but was scared to break up with, in fact when at the end of that summer I said to him I didn't want to sleep with him anymore and he had a girl friend living with him at the time that was tantamount to my having to move out of the house and, because I couldn't afford to pay fixtures etc. for a new place plus was scared, away from N.Y. So I knew never to do that again: live with someone I didn't love, that was totally horrible, I ended up totally hating Lenny. Also a sense by then of how I was acting from feeling insecure but being actually strong and so defeating myself, and a developing sense of having to be alone, if I lived with someone, to do it with a sense of family rather than marriage or that kind of romanticism. I'm now trying to explain my relation to Peter. I have no family, in effect, and no money. Also by this time have decided to write work as much as possible and not to take a shit job, to take the money free however I can manage that because my work is most important. Also that I in no way want to again set up a permanent monogamous relation no matter what my feelings because my feelings can always be therefore are always too complex and I can't stand breaking up with people. I just won't have it it's too painful it tears me apart. It's the most painful thing I know. Peter and I want the same kind of life, respect each other's work and both awhat? are artists (I'm trying to describe a kind of an attitude) and this way of living seems to be the only one I've found that allows me both base security,

[8]

emotional and economic, and total self-movement. I'm being so rational here, I don't feel rational, but I think trying to explain this history to you is, well you see it's not Peter I kept feeling when I was talking to you or Beth or anyone that we're talking about, it's our two different romanticisms: me being totally scared to and unwilling to commit myself to any one person, to any one place for that matter, or anything beside my working. This probably sounds pretentious I don't know how else to give the information. Problems of technical sincerity that aren't if we can get rid of taste important. Other information: I'll just give it: I live now economically by taking \$ from Peter's father who thinks a lot of my work, that's one reason he gives it, I feel guilty about this but don't see any other way of getting money which won't stop me from working/writing. I sleep with Rich Gold one or two nights a week who's a dear friend, a poet and a novelist, who Peter's also friends with, who I feel very close to. I've never tried to do with anyone what I'm trying to do with you, open myself completely and know you completely (plus documenting this) so there are no areas of privacy thus finally discovering if people are separate if we are separate from each other once we dissolve merge our memories (i.e. our histories), I've always had a huge sense of privacy, it's just that I regarded my working life as private, not my sexual life (what's the difference at this point?) all distinctions being solely functionally-valid, and could only relate to people who didn't try to get too near me and who left me alone enough. I've never met anyone who I thought was me until I met you and never got into what? these kinds of statements so suddenly letting my reservations go this way. I'm just opening myself, I trust you, which is a really strong statement for me. I can never decide if it's worth anything to ascribe qualities to a person but if it is I think

[9]

of myself as interested mainly in discovering relations, selfish, ambitious (in a funny way: to get to talk to people whose work I want to find out about tho here emotional desires) totally passionate reckless sometimes more sometimes less, more clearly I'm evading again: part of me's trying to tell you to steer clear of me because I feel both love for you and an unwillingness to say yes let's run off to ----- part of me wants to control the relation so I have everything: you you loving me and my life here Peter loving me, part of me the part I like wants to be close to you as long as you'll have me and to love/be with you as long as it's possible (as you can take become part of? Peter's and my relation) or see each other whenever or whatever, I mean in a way this is crazy and totally dependent on our seeing each other for 12 hours, then nothing, so fantasies explode, but I'm more interested in my and yours desire to open completely get rid of privacy explore that. Obviously everything will work out as it works out but I was feeling so jumpy tonight, not clear, feeling scared should I go to N.Y.? do you care for my work I mean whatever happens will it be if the sexual stuff doesn't work out, you're not wanting to know me, I couldn't stand that I couldn't stand that I can't stand friendships breaking up, what I'm saying this whole stupid tedious boring letter: friendship to me is really sacred, not like sexual love passion which comes and goes no matter how strong I mean I'm not not only into monogamy I'm not in some funny way into sex tho I love it, but opening up to someone that joy someone responding so rare is the most important thing I know that's why this piece I'm doing now is so important I couldn't stand if

[10] romantic feelings whatever spoiled that between us. I mean that friendship is sacred is totally unique in each instant and doesn't

concern other people in some way tho it does in others I mean
Peter here is a joy never never a hindrance. That's what I want
and beginning to feel totally with you.

Does this explain shit?

Going to ask you questions, but not here, will write tomoorrow.

Love TBT

[11] Alan, decided not to write you any more letters but just send you sections of my writing which are getting incredible and explain more than my letters can where my fears seem to be more active, my hesitations. But here just want to add: just listened to your tape, ideas for collaborations sound great I feel good hearing our ideas so similar so no problems absolutely no problems there. I'm being real brief because I decided I only want to send you writing not have to talk this more rational language any more for now. Only problem, not problem so much as tangle, I see, and you mention this on tape, unlike you I don't see the possibility of a monogamous relation between us, maybe you don't either, (this is hard for me to say but I want to straighten my thoughts out at least for myself) not because of Peter but more because of me: that's not how I relate to people, I need a few close what lovesloversfriends I have many needs maybe due to my lousy childhood I don't know and there are people now like Peter and Rich but also people at a distance like Bernadette David and Elly (Antin) who I deeply love and who love me and from whom I find it very painful to be separated. I.e. when you say "if I didn't feel as strongly about you as I do about Beth, I'd just say goodbye to you" and "I tend to have long relationships and grow out of them" that hurts me badly and scares me because you might see me as that, something an event to take from then grow out of, not a commitment that tries to understand as time passes (this sounds horrible o my god this sounds awful how can I say it I feel like joking I feel) I DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO SEE A NEW STRONG WHAT? LOVE FOR SOMEONE ERASING THE OTHER LOVES I FEEL I FEEL STRONGLY VERY RARELY AND THIS IS THE ONLY TIME I'M GOING TO BE ALIVE I KNOW OF I DON'T WANT TO GIVE UP PRECIOUS

RELATIONS I mean I HATE really HATE the whole American marriage romantic monogamy romance “you’re my girl” “you’re the one for me” “this is true love finally” not only because I’ve never seen my feelings work that way, tho god knows I do at times want to be with one person and only that person, but FOREVER? not only that but I so see that whole belief in one-to-one relations nuclear family groups etc. as totally destructive, upholding the general rich man’s economy, destroying people by again saying rigid distinctions exist a rigid world exists rigid categories exist, all feelings can be categorized, you can tell what’s going to happen “if it’s love” between you and X, there’s love, liking, hating, all those names when feelings needs fantasies are so much more complex, and the structures we accept socially: friend lover mistress wife upholding this false view of our feelings, no this basically police state (I’m logically jumping a few steps but I’m sure the reasoning is obvious), I mean why should Peter be a problem to, straightly, my loving you (I’m not say hippie-wise “O we all love one another wow”) I am saying that I refuse to let structures of a society I didn’t pick to be born into determine how I relate to people, just because I love Peter and live with him is no reason ~~to m~~ that you and Peter can’t whatever? anything, I don’t know, nothing’s happened yet. God am I preaching? yelling? I don’t mean to I just have these really strong beliefs? feelings! and I keep feeling I have to fight to hold them because the society is so against me in that way I mean it’s so hard to get to someone, o god, do you understand at all? I feel really close to you that’s why I’m fighting — enclosing section (short) of new work

[12]

Love, TBT

this is a good letter for me—

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The four letters reproduced here constitute a 12-page typescript, bound along with Acker's Part II of Section III of Breaking Through Memories into Desire and (cf. supra).

Transcription was made from a digital copy.

Acker's handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to our pagination.

The four letters were written in San Francisco between February 20 and March 5. On February 18, 1974, Kathy Acker had performed a reading at St. Mark's Poetry Project along with Ed Bowes, George Canaris, Mel Freilicher and Beth Carmony. In mid-February, probably in New York, she learned for the first time the name of her biological father: Donald Lehman. Around February 20-22, the day after she had dinner with Alan Sondheim and his partner Beth at their apartment and spent "12 hours" in their company, Acker flew back to San Francisco. While on the plane she started planning a piece she could do in collaboration with Sondheim, which would be a part of the series of works that she would eventually call Breaking Through Memories into Desire. The day after her arrival, ca. February 21-23, she writes 1) a first letter to Alan. 2) The second letter, written probably a few days later ca. February 24-28, extensively talks about the plan – the "monster" – of making the third part of Breaking... in collaboration with Alan Sondheim; Acker wants to document all of her personal feelings and memories about Alan as well as documenting their relationship and their conversations, using several devices like tape recorder, text (letters and writing-through texts) and video. She sends the letter with a xeroxed copy of the 1971 Section from DIARY, as well as with parts 2 and 3 of Breaking.... 3) The third letter was probably written the day after the second, likely on February 28 or March 1st as it mentions Tony Shafrazi's spray-painting upon Guernica; she observes that the correspondence is already turning into something like a diary: **this letter looks like a diary**; it also appears that her going to New York to meet Sondheim was already planned. 4) The fourth letter puts conditions on the correspondence. Acker would send her literary experiments, instead of letters, because she felt her language was too "rational" in the epistolary form. Simultaneously, on ca. March 4, Acker writes to Bernadette Mayer: **Sex sex confusion. I came back and thought I was still in New York, got Bernadette's your cold, then knew my life is changing just like Bernadette's.**

Notes:

442 KATHY ALEXANDER We don't know more about this "book". We believe this was actually a new title to designate an ambitious piece that would assemble her texts concerned with memory (Breaking Through Memories into Desire and Conversations) as well as the project with Alan.

445 ode An Ode, Alan Sondheim, Burning Deck Press (Providence), 1968.

445 diary Acker sent to Sondheim a xeroxed copy of her 1971 Section from DIARY.

445 rest of novel and stuff The words "rest of novel" probably allude to Part 2 [of Breaking Through Memories into Desire] and "stuff re you" to Section from

part III of: Breaking... which concerns Alan and was the first contribution to their collaborative project.

446 I guess I'm straining at the bit, looking for a situation of working that isn't as private as this kind of (me) writing to make private public break thru barriers break thru also make the working situation that way. But events don't happen fast enough. *This is a relationship played out through literary technology: Acker's questioning her practices, trying to invent protocols that push even deeper – DEEP TARANTULA – that touch the way the most "private" aspects of language are implicated in public, historicized circulation (or maybe even the material that predates language: childhood memory before speech, an interest which is carried to the much later work in the 90s about the nonverbal languages of visualization, pain, and growth). Plus she's 26 and impatient to figure it out! Five years later, in 1979, in the piece that she writes for L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E in which she translates and writes through a Pierre Guyotat interview, she writes, crossing through Guyotat:*

It doesn't at all work to say that you fantasize – that would be taking the fantasy for a representation of scenes. Rather, I believe, your use of fantasy enables you to render intricate, organicize the text. Freud explains that, for an individual, fantasy admits to all the combinations. Example: I hit you; I am hit... the verb here doesn't change. Likewise, in your fantastic texts, the verb (the action) is also the main actor and the represented. Fantasy, then, is a structural combination. It is: all possible actions, or the illusion of monotony. Variations and mutations repeat the same verbal structure. Do you agree?

Yes. The organic process I use immediately proposes, then divides the text.

Not what is supposedly represented, but the text. [...]'

Fantasy points to a major rift between representation and experience, between the virtual potential in the text, and the flatness of a (nonorganic) text which is taken for pure representation. In these foreplay letters to Sondheim, Acker is still trying to figure it out. She wants to know if the potential of encounter can generate even more potential in the text, letting it grow in unexpected ways that can't be accessed through writing alone. As this 1979 article suggests, five years later she has crossed sexual encounter off of her list of ways to produce organic potential, probably after the disastrous encounter with Sondheim. Although physical encounter will resurge as a principle generator of literary material and physical perception, once she gets into S/M. [CF]

446 **second part of whatever** *She is referring here to Part 2 [of Breaking Through Memories into Desire] clearly expressing that she wants to change the title. The "third part" alludes to what she entitled Section from part III of: Breaking... and maybe*

1. Kathy Acker, "The Invisible Universe," *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, n° 4, 1982.

also the texts from February 23 and 25 she gathered in April under the title Various Memory Experiments I.

447 sneezing She had caught Bernadette Mayer's cold in New York (cf. letter to B. Mayer, March 4 1974).

449 Guernica's On February 28, 1974, Tony Shafrazi spray-painted "KILL LIES ALL" on Picasso's Guernica hung in the MOMA. Which dates the letter probably from the same day or March 1.

449 P. Adams Peter Adams Sitney, historian of American avant-garde cinema.

452 Rich Gold About Rich Gold, cf. supra, p. 333.

452 merge our memories This ambition to overcome separation and therefore identity through assimilation of other's memories is echoed in an added section to Breaking Through Memories into Desire's first part, from January 31 (1974) sent as postcard to John Martin and B. Mayer in March: This society exists only insofar as I depend on my rememberings. If I try to learn (remember) everything, will I become everyone?/ dedicated to the destruction of all memories and societies./ by including the memories of everyone in me.

[Letter to Bernadette Mayer]

kathy acker

(3 / 4 / 1974)

[San Francisco, ca. March 4 1974]

THE BLACK TARANTULA
46 BELVEDERE
SAN FRANCISCO, CA. 94117

Nick Piombiono
Bernadette Mayer
Misty Whims
17 St. Marks Place
New York, N.Y.

Dear guys,

everything's totally confusing what better time to write. I can't even spell. Sex sex confusion. I came back and thought I was still in New York, got Bernadette's your cold, then knew my life is changing just like Bernadette's. Now I know reality exists, aren't I a good New Yorker? Writing a lot and who pops out but my father. No nightmares either. Might see the two of you soon if you want to see me, how's all your shit going? Stay low, not like me, black grey, crime's around the corner it's terrific! Got nothing to say. *never*.

Love, TBT

- [2] (3) How do I percieve these events? I remember the black. Raw and chill, my nose hurt, my hands hurt, and I'm happy. The afternoon came on wet, and somewhat misty; as it waned into dusk, I saw grey hills heave up round the horizon; as twilight deepened, I descend into a valley, dark with wood, and long after night has overclouded the prospect, I hear a wild rushing. I'm confused.

A servant lets me into a building, many lighted windows: a passage, I suddenly see a huge fire, I warm my numb senses and limbs.

I remember liking to read, in fact, adoring my books. Sequencing (time, space, language). Should be pleasure and constantly flexible:

2.

Therefore self-consciousness (-knowing) is not closed since names (i.e. "I" "me") are acts of memory, that kind of probable knowing. Other people don't really exist only insofar as I depend on my rememberings. This society exists only insofar as I depend on my rememberings. If I try to learn (remember) everything, will I become everyone?

dedicated to the destruction of all memories and societies.
by including the memories of everyone. in me.

1/31/74 love TBT

EDITORIAL NOTE.

This letter is part of the 15 letters (24 pages of typewritten and manuscript text) archived at UCSD Library Special Collections & Archives – United Artists Records – Kathy Acker to Bernadette Mayer – Mss. 1, Box 1, Folder 1.

The transcription was made from a 2014 scan.

This letter is a white small card, typewritten on both sides, bearing on the top left side the Black Tarantula stamp: “The Black Tarantula/ 46 Belvedere/ San Francisco, CA. 94117”; the address of Mayer is typed in red ink as well as “Dear guys,”; we date and locate the letter from the postage stamps: “MAR 4/ 1. PM/ 1974/ U.S Postal Service CA 940” and “San Francisco/ Calif.” Acker’s handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics. Numbers in the interior margin correspond to our pagination.

Notes:

462 **Sex sex confusion** If this moment were a tarot card it would be *The Devil*: the card about digging deep through sensation and experience to the roots of fear and desire. What can our sexual desires transform, and what do we need to abandon before we burn out? *Cristy Road* gives us a revolutionary interpretation of this card in her Next World Tarot: “*The Devil is the belief that the only way out is through siding with your oppressor. Sometimes we don’t have the resources to immediately cut the ties, so how do we flourish and find self-preservation? How do we evade systems of oppression in eras of destitution? ... Dig deep into the choices we make in order to survive, and question what it takes to escape what no longer serves you.*”¹ Kathy Acker is the best at taking the shit that surrounds us and transforming it into radical tools for hopeful ways of perceiving and communicating. Dodie Bellamy writes, in an essay structured as a letter to Acker, “*Shit is the oxygen of your literary atmosphere. The cunt is the mouth that breathes it in.*”² The stakes for this impending encounter with *Sondheim* are high: a desire to break through to a new capacity in writing and perceiving, a relationship built on mutual intellectual attraction, in which every time they fuck they’ll be making art. What happens isn’t literary transcendence but it does give us a first-row seat to a lot of the shit of heterosexual relationships that Acker will go on to work with and transform again and again, searching for languages and feelings outside of hierarchy. [CF]

1. *Cristy Road*, *Next World Tarot*, *op. cit.*

2. Dodie Bellamy, in *Moving Borders*, ed. Mary Margaret Sloan, *op. cit.*

[Untitled Tape 1]

alan sondheim

kathy acker

(3/1974)















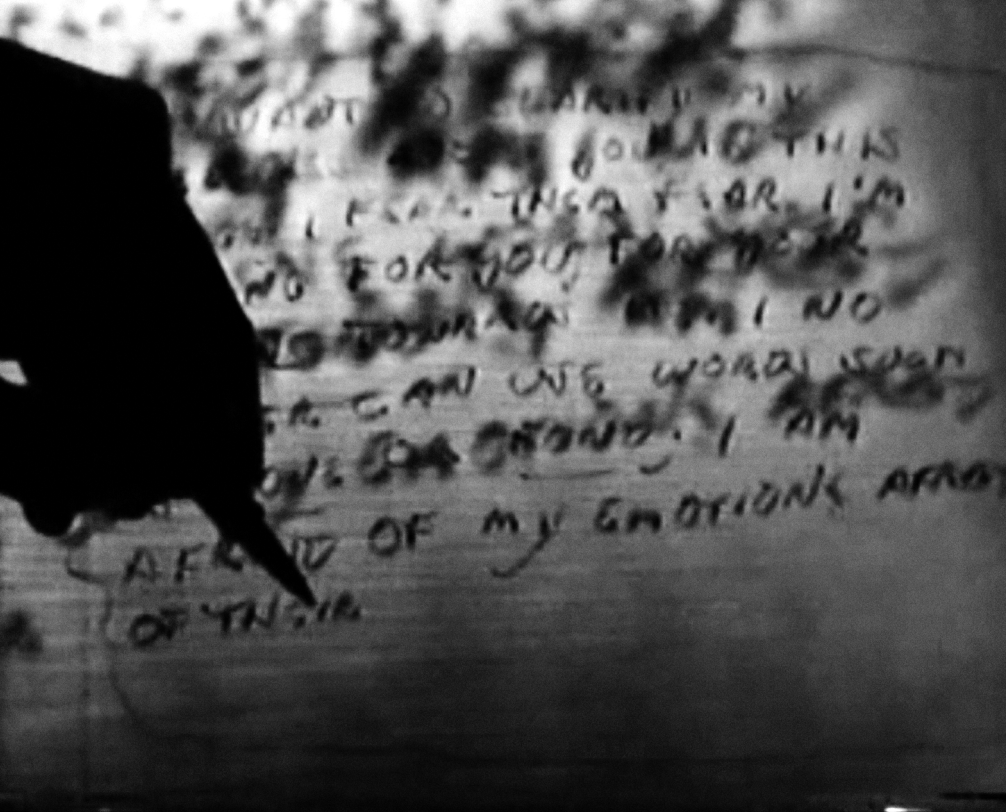












[Three different fonts have
been used to transcribe:

Alan's voice

Kathy's voice

Emily's voice]

[medium shot of K. seated] I met I met Alan Sondheim when I was in New York about two or three weeks ago I had dinner at his and Beth's house the last night I was in New York and ended up talking to Alan for about twelve hours we talked mainly about certain gestural and mental similarities we had both noticed that existed between us and at the end decided to do a piece together the next day I went back to California and immediately humm decided to do a memory experiment I've at that point my work was into doing various rather strange memory experiments and I called this one breaking through memory to desire I was trying to find out what the structures or structure of intentions were behind my remembering so I started writing down everything that I had heard about Alan or heard about his work or knew about him before I met him we've many friends in common and some of my friends had told me a lot about his work and I had seen some of it and I thought this could be a fairly humm boring rehearsal of facts so that I could see somewhat so called objectively what the structures what my desires were which underlaid the narrative of these facts and I ended up with a very strong emotional passage which I sent to Alan oh let me also add that I don't know who my father is ah he left my mother when she was three or four months pregnant according to her story and that in my life whenever a man has tried to act fatherly to me I've totally rejected him I prefer very feminine men and it wasn't until recently that

[1:00]

[2:00]

I at all became interested in trying to trace my memories and the feelings behind those memories about my father

[off-screen] and I received a a word dated on march first section from part three of long work
breaking through memories into desire how close can I get to someone what would become each other concerning my
friendship with Alan Sondheim being human is too boring and difficult who wants to be human all the time
I'm sick of being rational I'm doing things right I'm becoming a cat I sit on a bathtub first Rich comes over after-
noon one thirty wakes me up we fuck two two and a half times he doesn't come the third time because Peter calls he is
coming home we don't have time I know who Alan is Alan is my father he'd better be my perfect father take care
of me but not restrain me doing anything I want touch me softly with his hands and voice like everything I do if
Alan isn't my perfect father I'll turn away from him unless he touches me again I'll attack him really hard tear
him I'll make him shrivel into nothing I have to think about myself be alone without lovers so I can think about
myself Alan helps me he tells me since Rich and Peter like each other no problem I have to forget what other people
tell me myself Alan helps me that's who Alan is there must be a new language I can write by myself when I'm
by myself TBT how can anyone go from outside-in understand what is outside except through him herself can
only I say go from inside-out A but I am nothing the universe is everything I have to figure out how the universe

[3:00]

[4:00]

works TBT I don't understand who I am the act of perceiving TBT and A if there is no difference between inside the mind and outside the mind there is only the perceiving events these approaches understandings are coequal Alan I don't understand a lot of what you write you understand everything I write I understand you when you talk to me and I feel wonderful I feel simultaneously like we're twins who are actually touching fingers joined to fingers and you're protecting me you have your arms around me your right hand on my hair but I'm not angry at you feel you're taking my power away I don't have to be a mother to you as I have to be to most people I know I don't want that not now I don't want parents I don't want anything forests but Alan's hand on me I want to know what's happening hear drops of rain fall against surfaces to my left my sapphire white silver shawl wrapped around me blankets over my red-brown dress I keep remembering at that point what I was trying to do was I had begun using Alan as I would use an analyst to get to memories which were too painful for me to get to any other way and I think what the issue is and I think what we've decided is that I agree with Alan that I was wrong to send him that material that in that way I was ripping him off because I was using him as say an analyst however what the problem is here and what we are trying to explore is whether I was right to use him at all that is I feel that when

[5:00]

[6:00]

I write I can do anything as long as I'm not viciously saying something about someone they don't want said
 about them if you know for my purposes of exploration however Alan feels that I was ripping him
 off because I was using him and he felt that he was able to feel feelings for me I gave him that opportu-
 nity as if I was truly feeling those feelings

if I could have I think I would have become a father but I never
had that information to go on and yet since you don't have that information either I wouldn't have known how to
react to you as such I simply can't imagine and I almost feel that what I should do since you have your
father's last name and at least his place of employment is that even if you wouldn't do this that I should go and
find him and to come back to you a complete mimic and at least this is what you would really want and
then I would then be able to say to you that everything is ok no matter what you did because that's what you really
want and that's what really comes through the writing

but that's not what i want now

but then what do you
want now because I think that the change would be so deep in you and at least you're crying on the phone
and your voice on the phone was always something that is forcing itself out something that you didn't want to

[7:00]

come to the surface at all

that's right but now I have gotten to be able to do those memories directly and not to have to use you to get there

can you do that so quickly within a period of two or three weeks and after twenty-six years of life? can you make such a fast reversal

yeah

well I mean

I know you feel you can but I wonder if you can

well

I'm just saying to you something that I feel about myself that I am doing about myself and you are telling me you know more about myself than I do

yes I'm saying it

[8:00]

all right it's a question of authority

no it's not

a question of authority you put things in a control situation so much at the time that I almost feel that I am very much afraid of ordinary discourse because you will put me in a position of feeling of saying that

*I am controlling you when in fact I am doing nothing of the sort or maybe even feel the opposite or maybe feel
neither maybe feel neutral and so what happens what happens is that you somehow gain the power that
you're saying you don't have that you're saying you negated and I feel even more in necessity to mimic if I played
your father if I met your father if I played your father I would be perfectly safe because no matter how much you
turned against me I would simply be able to retreat into that I would*

do you want to play my father now?

I th-

ink I feel I can play your father now

you do want?

[9:00]

*I do want because it's the only safe position if I was
Mister Lehmann your father's name if I was Mister Lehmann then no matter what you say you couldn't
break that bond with me it was my choice twenty-six years ago to break that bond with you*

right

it hasn't

been your choice

right

so it makes me very very safe to be Mister Lehman

right

it puts me in a very safe position

but

if you as Alan broke this bond with me you would be just as safe

but Alan is not capable perhaps Alan is

a thirty-one year old artist Alan is not the head of Wildroot Cream Oil if you like Alan is not in a po-

sition simply to control or to manipulate lives Alan is on the outside of everything Alan is an underground

man Alan will remain underground

that's not true that's your decisions about yourself

it's very hard to know whether they are decisions

about myself or whether they have been decided for me in my mind they are not decisions I have made conscious-

ly and they may not be decisions

you can leave me! you can tell me to go back to California

[10:00]

I could start breathing helium too

right

who know all right I mean you think of them as being coequal

not coequal of course not that was

an overly romantic statement

when you say statement like that what I feel is that puts me in a guilt situation

what

is very interesting is that you constantly react as if I I mean I'm either attacking you well I think we can just

cut it right there that I am attacking you I did not say that to put you in a guilt situation I had no inkling

that that's going to put you in a guilt situation I am not trying to attack you

ok

I am simply saying as your

*father I would feel very safe because it would be my choice in the first place to leave you and you are a very
powerful person at this point and god knows if you are powerful now what you're gonna be like in a couple of
years it's gonna be a hell to pay for anybody who gets in touch with you you're gonna burn people you're*

[11:00]

gonna kill people baby you really are don't kid yourself if you don't think you are

[black screen]

[close-up of K touching her breasts; A off-screen speaking quietly] *I don't want you to look at that image I don't want
that image to do anything at all for you I'm speaking very softly no one can hear me that image is part
of Kathy everything of that image is part of Kathy and Kathy's work I don't want you to pay any attention I want
you to look to the left to the monitor I want you to look to the left to the monitor and listen to me talk about
the world I want to talk about the world and I want a envy for me I want you to think that I'm a great
artist I want you to understand everything I'm saying I'm going to read some of the characteristics of the world
and I want you to pay attention now don't look at the monitor and pay no attention to them I'm in myself and
turned away I'm in myself and turned away from her one of the characteristics of the world is its spatial and
temporal dimensionality in the large can you hear that you can hear that she can't hear that she continues to touch
her breasts one of the characteristics of the world is that the active counting functions is a primitive interlocking of
the three languages I'm saying this reading it from a page I'm concentrating on the page I'm paying no attention*

[12:00]

to the image on the screen I'm not sure if the image is the same I haven't examined it don't look at the screen
 pay no attention to her listen to my voice she is drawing power away from me I've got to take it back I've got
 to convince you that the important thing is to pay attention to the world to pay attention to the external world not
 to pay attention what's going on inside me because nothing is going on inside you may think that's possible to go
 on this language the only language that is possible to go on while I'm talking is the language that I'm speak-
 ing pay attention please for god's sakes pay attention to what I'm saying one of the characteristics of the world is
 that its commensurable languages are aspects philosophical ideas now the cases are fundamentals or cases are
 socio-cultural entities I must speak softly only you can hear me no one else can hear me no one else no one else
 what's going on Kathy doesn't know what this piece is Emily doesn't know what this piece is this piece is between
 you and me myself and the audience one of the characteristics of the world is the grounding on its phenomenology
 and history what does that mean can you follow what that means did you understand what I was saying did you
 understand how long it took to read that sentence do you understand what intensity it necessitated I'm kind of del-
 ving into the world so that I can produce such a works one of the characteristics of the world is its interiority do
 you know how complex that word interiority is do you how long it took me to arrive at its notion do you only do
 you know how long it took me to arrive at that particular choice do you understand what is meant by that do

[13:00]

you know how much steps there is in things do you know how much it is impossible to produce an ultimate analysis how much I have tried to do that how much I have not been able to succeed now I am distracting you now you are paying more attention look to the left to the set right there that's right on the wall right at that spot all right to the left to the set to the medium left if you like and you can still see a little of the image now you better look a bit farther I don't want you to see anything I don't want you to notice anything at all one of the characteristics of the world is the partial reducibility of its material and abstractional aspect am I covering you am I covering you with my language am I projecting myself how much is this defense how much can you understand that this is about the world an external world exists how much can you understand that can you understand that this is external to you can you understand that this is totally meaningless too Kathy's totally meaningless to you I'm only totally meaningless to almost anyone who would ever hear this but it's meaningful to you yes you seem to understand you seem to understand how meaningful it is to examine a notion do you know how much struggle I have had to go with through one of the characteristics of the world is sexuality I would rather talk about sexuality than do it I would rather talk about reference to the body than refer to the body I would rather talk about its location somewhere than have to examine that where one of the characteristics of the world is differentiation if this and that if this and als otherwise and and so forth and so on one of the characteristics of the world is an

[14:00]

apparent absence of infinities in the abstractional analysis and the material aspect you thought that I would stop on sexuality but I didn't I won't stop there I'll continue I'll continue to produce this tape

[blue screen]

[15:00]

[extreme close-up of K's genitals; A is touching her with two fingers; her voice off-screen]

No lower yeah that's

ok can I close my eyes no that's too hard higher no no no no there yeah

that's ok am I too dry? ok like better ok oh that's oh that's

[16:00]

good no no no not up ok yeah oh that's nice your fin-

gers are really dry yeah that's better nnnn ahhh! you are just doing that

[17:00]

so hard don't go too hard I mean you are good you are just one a little little too

hard uh-hh that's good no no not too hard you're

[18:00]

really dry hssss really dry! ahh! yeah yeah that's good yeah that's

good yeah no! come on concentrate! look! augh!

[19:00]

shit! this is ridiculous no no no keep going it feels nice I'm just never gonna

[20:00]

come oh I'm not gonna oh ok it feels nice augh! shiiit! ammm that's better ammm
 that's good that feels better a bit closer to my clit no no no not that not that
 up yeah there right there oh that's good right there oh that's really good yeah I'm re-
 ally dry so try not to move back and forth too much oh that's good yeah that's much bet-
 ter yeah yeah oh shit! hssss! uhh what the hell are you doing shhh! no
 come on no

[21:00]

[medium shot, A is seated against a wall] I feel that in the last tape when I just watched it it wasn't obvi-
 ous to me what I found interesting about the tape that is what I found interesting about the tape
 didn't seem to come out so I want to think about it a bit I didn't find it at all interest-

[22:00]

ing about where in my cunt that what sections of my cunt or what sections around my clit or in
 my clit are sensitive or not sensitive what is interesting about that though Alan finds that extremely
 interesting what is interesting to me about that is how that generally relate to mine and Alan's sexua-
 lity to the way we have been having sex the last two days because there is a lot of discrepancies between
 the amount of pleasure we give each other I'm able to give Alan a lot more pleasure than he is able to give

me one of the main problems being that my body is very unlike Beth's who he's lived with for the last four years [smiles and laughs quickly] I guess I feel a little embarrassed saying this which is why I went to a smile at that moment and this enables me I mean and that is what I really want to explore to in a way have more power over Alan or to let him have more power of me I mean there are various relations that come out of this I mean one is the way in which I feel I have power in the relationship is that I can give Alan a great deal of sexual pleasure and I often feel that men get their power over me by pleasing me a great deal so I feel there is a discrepancy there in our power however I feel that Alan in certain ways can has his power on me because I've behaved badly toward him by sending him that work and by using him so he can play on my guilt feeling to a great deal and I think the physical ways we relate are interesting for those reasons

[medium shot of A, naked torso; E off-screen] Put your knee down

it's ok I'm showing up fine I just listened to Kathy's speech and I don't want to make this into a kind of a Virginia Woolf episode but I figure that I might as well say what I feel and that is that when I first met Kathy and for the past I would say all the way up until

[23:00]

[24:00]

about the day after she got here I didn't think that my relationship had anything to do at all with power I never
 even thought of power I never even thought of control except she mentions control a couple of times and I guess I should
 have learned about it and I think what's going on a little bit is a sort of sexual tactics not necessarily tactics about
 what we do in bed and it's interesting how she makes judgments about what I feel but tactics about what
 she speaks about oh I don't think I'm being that clear what I mean is by her speaking about certain things and
 not speaking about certain things she is assuming a position of power and a question for me is why she is assuming
 this and why she is assuming a particular kind of power that is a sexual power this also has to do with why
 this tape is so sexually charged for me when most of my work isn't and most of my work is [?] quite abstract and
 I find myself a little bit succumbing to to what may actually be a control situation that is that I obviously can't
 sit on a chair next to Kathy and discuss mathematical hierarchy as a transformation which is what a part of my
 present work is about or discuss quantum logic where it's very easy to discuss sexuality because it's something that is
 a first of all a ground for most transformations second of all things we have in common this automatically gives
 her a sense of power and the fact that this for me is a public as well as a private domain whereas for her it seems to
 be a public domain it's the second source of her power and what I find interesting is and a little bit irrita-
 ting is that the whole thing seems to be revolving around notions of power or notions of Kathy out of

[25:00]

[26:00]

removal from me or myself out of removal from Kathy sexuality as a defense system something of this sort in-
stead of revolving around what at least in my slightly bewildered idealistic romantic mind is partly the notion of
sex which is a notion of togetherness it seems to me that none of this tape has anything to do with a a notion of
togetherness with Kathy and me being together but more about the fact that we seem to be in a very unfortunate
and unhappy situation and trying desperately to get apart ok you can cut [27:00]

[medium shot of A holding a microphone; a kitchen is in the background] I think everyone should buy and read love's
body by Norman O [starts laughing compulsively until the end of the take] [28:00]

[close frame on A's face, lying naked in bed holding a microphone, the frame progressively widens; E off-screen] Like that
it's on

ok this is a piece which is a combination of an external structure and the grounding of that struc-
ture in a certain kind of sexuality in other words I'm going to describe the situation that's being estab-
lished and at the same time would be enacting the situation and the description is going to be along
the lines of the general theory of reality I've been working on for the past year the theory at present is about [29:00]

three hundred pages and consists of a mathematical formalism which has three parts excuse me the
 hierarchy of transformations in other words ways of describing transformations in reality and a hierarchy
 that emerges out of these methods out of these ways of description the second part then is a formalism which al-
 lows one to generate strings of symbols and the third part is a formalism which is a description of a single
 transformation the other part of the theory is based on the notion of an anthology that is what things really exist
 in the world and here it breaks down everything into a triadic structure one of the things that exist then [30:00]
 would be the phenomenological level of reality phenomenological aspect the phenomenological sphere there
 is an innumerable ways to describe it another thing would be by thing again I mean mode of knowledge
 language would be the abstractional level of reality the abstractional aspect and a third thing then would
 be the material aspects of reality or materiality there are also two other or three other divisions that are of
 interest one is internal external another is objective subjective and a third is immersive definable the [31:00]
 immersive definable distinction breaks down into another hierarchy the internal external breaks down
 into [K, dressed, enters from the right side of the screen, licking his feet; he continues speaking] the internal external
 thing breaks down into a differentiation that can be placed with the other with the other modes the
 subjective objective one is another kind of cover structure and the cover structure can be applied to the

three that tickles god can be applied to the three aspects the three aspects in general in terms of
 the structure of the piece the phenomenological aspect is revealed by both movements of my body and my
 use of language instead as not the words I choose but my tone of voice ahhh the abstractional as-
 pect might have to do with the control or the political implications of the situation [K's face appears over his
 testicles] ahhh and the abstractional haha the mat the material aspect has to
 do with the actual physical situation that we are working in the physical structure that we are setting up that
 is Kathy touching me Kathy sucking me while at the same time I attempt a description so in this sense
 the piece becomes very very self referential and also becomes kind of a negation because ahhh to
 some extent I don't feel I can I don't feel I can I can carry out what what I'm attempting to car-
 ry out so materially what is occurring is ok thought processes I wonder whether I'm going to
 come while I'm desperately trying to hold on to my language it's becoming harder and harder to think and at
 the same time harder and harder to resist moving into kind of an enjoyment of this and dropping the micro-
 phone at the same time while I talk I'm beginning to think that the words are a sort of a defense at
 the same time Kathy is licking my asshole and holding on to my penis and it and it creates a certain force that
 I have to put in my words that I'm not quite sure I can get out so this is a this is more or less a description

of oh Jesus oh a description of what's happening aaand uuum abstractionally I mean I'll
 have to talk about abstract structures ok the political significance of this the structural significance is
 that I'm availing myself into an act that I normally wouldn't to the audience and it's a very direct revela- [35:00]
 tion you are getting a fairly good ahhh oh my god a fairly good a feeling of how I react sexu-
 ally huum this is only the second time of my life that I have this sensation last time was yesterday and
 the phenomenological aspect is actually what I'm feeling what my mind is is going through it's kind of
 a confusion and ahhhh [K starts giving A a blow job] a confusion a real temptation a defense I
 defend myself against Kathy I don't want to give in I don't want to come I want to be able to continue talk until
 to describe the theory to show how the structure of the world works so that there is there can be a separation be- [36:00]
 tween me and the world I really feel a need for the separation oh god because otherwise I'm likely to fall
 into something and realize how little I understand about things I don't want to do that I don't want to stop under-
 standing I want to be able to hold on to myself and I really I really want to be able to stay in in control
 so if I can just say ok what I'm doing is phenomenology is very abstract it's a certain point of my penis I can and
 and feel a certain point and a certain heat and she has her finger in my anus and that feels very good and I
 keep tightening my muscles and wondering how much of me is in here as long as I can think of this I can

think in terms of that discussion everything seems ok I'm afraid of losing that I'm afraid of having having
 TO having to give in in a certain way and then also I wonder like now am I winning because in [37:00]
 a sense it's in a kind of a battle holding on to my holding on to my mind well at the same time not
 being able to stop one movement I can feel her hands cold against my balls it's just an amazing sensation
 and she hears me and she takes advantage of it and does it and and that makes it hard it makes it har-
 der I ahhh I thin ahhh maybe I can come back from this eh hh eh hh I
 can make it back go out there I I gotta do something I'm opening up myself far too
 much uuuh [A stops talking, breathes loudly, whines; K continues to give him a blowjob until A appears [38:00]
 to come, screaming violently] cut cut! [39:00]
 [close frame on K's head, as K slowly touches parts of her face and neck; the frame follows her hands to her breasts, to her
 genitals, and pans down to her feet] [40:00]
 [close-up of a hand tracing a rectangle on a surface and writing inside; A off-screen says the words out loud while they are
 being written] I want to I want to clarify my I want to clarify my feelings about you I want [44:00]

to clarify my feelings about you in this space I I fear them fear I'm falling for
 you for your I fear I'm falling for you for your actions towards me I no lon-
 ger I no longer can use words I no longer can use words such as love or fond I [45:00]
 no longer can use words such as love or fond I am I am afraid I am afraid of my I am afraid of my
 emotions afraid of I'm afraid of my emotions afraid of their effect there is so little there [46:00]
 is so little space there is so little space to move in so little there is so little space to move in so
 little time so little time there is so little space to move in so little time I have to know you

[close-up of a hand drawing a rectangle on a surface and writing inside; K, off-screen, says the words out loud while they
 are being written] I feel extremely tired and sad I feel extremely tired and
 sad I'm I'm used to being by myself most of the time and ha- [47:00] [48:00]
 ving my own space and time I'm used to being by myself most of the time and having my own
 space and time I'm no I keep I keep thinking about po- [49:00]
 wer not my power not only my power but the but about the [50:00]
 power concerning our perceptions to perceptions and events of our work I want

to say I'm scared of your of you that you'll take the power away from my work but
 I'm I don't know if that's true if I feel that's true right now I'm right now I'm [51:00]
 beginning to right now I'm beginning to hate the words I my I my I my I
 my I can't think about my feelings

[medium shot of E sitting against a wall] I talked to Alan before Kathy comes and after Kathy comes and [52:00]
 there is a build up before and a let down afterwards now there is something that begins in a differ-
 ent way and it's normal and it's a struggle it's intense and it's not intense humm we just
 spent hours taping about them and I feel very saturated knowing them confusing in and
 out and seeing how similar and dissimilar they really are it's hard for me to stand back really see [53:00]
 what they've done although I think it's it's felt very thoroughly looking at yourself and loo-
 king at each other looking at yourself it's all kind of one continuous process it's just over and over
 and kind of has a rhythm

[medium shot of K sitting at a table, E is off-screen, A comes to sit in front of K] you'll all sit here and you come and sit [54:00]

then I'll walk away *why do you want to walk away?* *maybe I don't even want to sit next to you there I'm not in the*
picture totally *and the mic is right for you*
 it's again the same thing?!
 this is insane!
 give her the mic
 ok you
hear *it's your mic* *right it's your mic and I'll give you the video later*
 I have nothing to say *you obviously*
have something to say *since you are holding the mic*
 you've gave it to me
 she told me to!
 culous! cut cut just cut this is ridi-

The [Untitled Tape 1] is a black and white EIAJ tape, with a duration of 54 minutes. Several digital copies are in circulation. The tape originally wasn't titled; ¹ the name "Blue Tape" was given later in unknown circumstances. ² According to Kraus and Sondheim, "forgotten for more than two decades, "The Blue Tape" resurfaced in 2000. The filmmaker Tony Conrad, a friend and colleague of Sondheim's who'd since moved to Buffalo, New York, had kept and restored it."³

The stills from the tape, above, are image transcriptions from a digitalization belonging to Emily Cheng. We chose to make at least one still for each sequence of the movie. They are arranged in chronological order from top to bottom and left to right. None of the frames were cropped, all the images are stills of the full frame. We tried to choose the stills not depending on how much they exposed of each of the performer, but on how accurately they would show the different moments of the tape.

The [Untitled Tape 1] was the first tape Kathy Acker and Alan Sondheim made in mid-March 1974, at Alan Sondheim and Beth Cannon's apartment in New York on 17th Street. Alan and Kathy had met in New York, at the reading she gave at the St. Marks's Poetry Project on February 18, 1974, along with Ed Bowes, George Canaris, Mel Freilicher and Beth Carmony in the "younger poet" Monday-night reading slot. The day before flying to San Francisco, a day or two after the reading, ca. February 19-22, Acker had dinner at Sondheim and Cannon's and spent twelve hours in their/his company. That night they may have agreed to do a piece together. After her return to California, they sent each other letters, audio tapes, and talked on the phone regularly. In the period when Acker was in San Francisco, before she returned to New York, Alan and Beth separated after a four and a half year relationship. Beth moved in with Ed Bowes when Bernadette Mayer (Ed's partner) moved out.

Alan would have suggested that they do a tape in order to pay for her trip to the East Coast. They effectively, according to Emily Cheng, received money from Rhode Island School Design (R.I.S.D.) to do the piece. Acker was open to the idea to use film; in her letters, she lightly suggested that they might use video to document each other's daily life while apart. Alan also claims he suggested that they "explore sexuality" since Acker had "worked in Times Square". ⁴ In order to shoot the tape he called Emily Cheng, one of his students when he was a guest artist in her freshman 3-D class at R.I.S.D.. She filmed the tapes on an EIAJ black-and-white Sony deck, maybe 3600.

The tape was shot in one day (the second tape – cf. *infra* –, was shot the day after). Emily and Alan came earlier to the apartment to set things up, then Acker arrived and

1. "We always referred to it as the one Alan and Kathy did" (Emily Cheng, email to the editor, April 12, 2019); on the program of the projection at the Whitney Museum in 1976 the tape bears no name.

2. Maybe Chris Kraus invented the name "Blue Tape", in reference to "blue movies" which used to designate "pornographic" films in the U. S. , and in reference to Wählro's 1969 *Blue Movie* (cf. *infra*, Matias Viegner, "Afterword").

3. Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 102-103.

4. "About the [Untitled Tape 1]", Alan Sondheim, 2002, cf. *infra*, p. 611.

fixed lunch. The camera was propped on a ladder and Emily Cheng sat on a covered bathtub to shoot. During the blow job scene, the camera was set on an inverted cereal bowl propped on the ladder; at one point Cheng purposely zoomed in and went out of focus to protect what she felt was an exposure of “Alan’s vulnerability”.¹ After eight hours of shooting, Alan and Emily left the apartment to eat; “Kathy wanted to be alone and stayed behind”.² When they came back, Alan (Emily doesn’t mention it) remembers that Acker was sitting outside the door, unable to get in, “talking about suicide and crying”.³

There was no later editing of the tape. The only editing was in-camera, as they went along. Sondheim had no “editing equipment, and editing was problematic from Portapacks. I remember we made up the sections as we went; they’re in the order they were made, nothing was done after the tape was finished. We wouldn’t have had time or place to edit it [...] it was made in a single day. The decisions were made by both of us; sometimes I’d create a structure (writing on the monitor) and she’d fill it out, sometimes (shots of her breasts), I’d fill out a structure she wanted, etc. But what I remember is that it was a real-time collaboration.”⁴

They “parted dubious friends”.⁵ Alan Sondheim claimed Acker gave him a pinworm infection, telling him, “When you sleep with hippies you take your chances”.⁶ They kept in touch by phone for a while. Sondheim sent Acker a postcard at the end of July. Apparently, and this remains a mystery, Acker taped a conversation that she had with Eleanor Antin, where she was telling her all that happened with Sondheim in New York. It was “really nasty”. It was supposed to be broadcast ca. mid-July on KPFA (San Francisco) or on WBAI in New York, so everyone will learn know who a shit Alan is I got my revenge (cf. *infra*, p. 552). The reasons for this “revenge” remain obscure. Our attempts to find the Antin tape were unfruitful.

The tape was screened at St. Mark’s Poetry Project, maybe on March 18,⁷ where “there was dead silence afterward”; Acker concluded the projection with “You’ve had your fun, children, now go home, or something to that effect”. Vito Acconci was present. Acker and Sondheim also screened it at R.I.S.D. “and everyone cried”⁸ and at Yale University where “the audience laughed”⁹. Maybe was it also shown at the Wesleyan University in Connecticut (where “everyone was in shock”¹⁰) as well as at UCSD where

1. “About the [Untitled Tape 1]”, Emily Cheng, 2018, cf. *infra*, p. 613.

2. “About the [Untitled Tape 1]”, Emily Cheng, cf. *infra*, p. 511

3. Alan Sondheim, email to the editor and Emily Cheng, November 16, 2019: “(we [Sondheim and Cheng] went out to get something to eat, if I remember correctly, and she couldn’t get into the place – and was sitting outside the door when we returned talking about suicide and crying – I don’t think this was easy for any of us).”

4. Alan Sondheim (email to the editor, April 12, 2019).

5. Alan Sondheim, *biog.txt*, online at <www.alansondheim.org/biog.txt> [accessed on July 5, 2019].

6. Alan Sondheim (email to the editor, August 21, 2018).

7. For that day Neil Hackman, Leonard Neufeld and Alan Sondheim are registered on St. Mark’s Poetry Project’s calendar of events.

8. “About the [Untitled Tape 1]”, Alan Sondheim, 2002, cf. *infra*, p. 611.

9. Alan Sondheim (email to the editor, April 6, 2019).

10. Emily Cheng (email to the editor, April 12, 2019).

only Kathy would have been present. In 1976 it was shown at the Whitney Museum, along with Emily Cheng and Alan Sondheim's *Red Brigade* and *Theses after Marx*; a flyer was printed with texts by Sondheim and Acker (cf. *infra*). "Over the years, Kathy and I make \$2000-\$3000 from the tape".¹ After those screenings Acker and Sondheim agreed not to show the tape again without mutual consent.

Emily Cheng has never been able to watch the entire tape since it was made, and Alan Sondheim doesn't want to see it anymore. They both feel somehow traumatized by the experience and its representation.

Notes.

465 [Untitled Tape 1] In the piece that she read at the 2013 Bay Area Video Club (SF) screening of *[Untitled Tape 1]*, Dodie Bellamy talks about how the tape does capture a little bit of the difficulty and charm of Kathy the person. Then she guides us through the *Blood and Guts* dream maps: "In Acker's dream maps, the most insidious Other takes the form of a giant worm. huge, jellyfish worm. translucent, almost, like vomit. no eyes cause no brain. huge pink tongue and sharper-than shark teeth. the most frightening being and gets more and more so. fills up whole street to the blue sky. The worm slithers through a ghost town that disintegrates into sand-dust, over hills of gray and brown hard soil with no vegetation. The dim gray light never changes. The worm swims through an area of almost opaque white, the same color as the worm. It swims cause brainless. It swims to the edge of the page which is THE END OF THE WORLD. Indistinct, unstoppable, unredeemable, the worm is a jiggling mass of oblivion, Bataille's weighty animality at its god-awful worst. I don't want this dream. I'm going to die soon."² Bellamy goes on to make a beautiful connection between the worm, the Acéphale group (whose logo focused on the colon – another worm, site of logic outside of the brain), and Acker's constant efforts to find ways to love outside of dumb convention. In the dream maps, as Bellamy takes us across them with her, sometimes Kathy rides the worm. She rides it to the end of the world, and as this is Acker we know that this a good place. Like Acker writes in *Empire of the Senseless*, in a citation that author Jeanette Winterson uses, also, to summarize Kathy's project: "And then I thought that, one day, maybe, there'd be a human society in a world which is beautiful, a society which wasn't just disgust."³ But when I'm watching the *[Untitled Tape 1]* and reading the transcription I just keep thinking "Ugh the white worm is EVERYWHERE in normative sex stuff, the BIG BAD is the transparent and totally noncritical want to keep

1. Alan Sondheim, *biog.txt*, online at <www.alansondheim.org/biog.txt> [accessed on July 5, 2019].

2. Dodie Bellamy, from "All the Empty Spaces are Love: Kathy Acker's Dream Maps," read at "Introducing *Blue Tape*" at the BAVC, 7 May 2013. The whole piece was initially on the BAVC blog but the entry isn't there anymore, many thanks to the author who sent me her Word doc of the BAVC remarks. The BAVC description of the series in which *[Untitled Tape 1]* was shown: <www.bavc.org/blog/lost-treasures> [accessed 31 July, 2019].

3. Kathy Acker, *Empire of the Senseless*, cited in Jeanette Winterson, "Introduction," *Essential Acker*, New York: Grove Press, 2002.

power stuff just the way it is, i.e., structurally fucked!" The thing that strikes me the most from A's dialogue in 1974 is how tone-deaf it is to gender dynamics. Tone-deaf to how talking about power in sex always tugs at the mechanisms by which power codes masculinity and feminity, how perceived sex effects the right to space and creation, who we expect to create intellectual art and who we expect to be sexually available. When A. says don't look at the screen pay no attention to her listen to my voice she is drawing power away from me I've got to take it back [...] am I covering you am I covering you with my language am I projecting myself, I see the fanged white worm freaking out because power is shifting and the world might be changing. It makes me feel pretty gross to watch the [Untitled Tape 1] imagining that I'm at the Whitney screening in 1976 (cf. infra, p. 592), I think it would have been so depressing if you were fem or afab and stuck in a room watching the worst sexual dynamics play out in giant blobs of light. But then I think about 1995 Acker and the excerpt from *Pussy King of the Pirates* that she published in the book *Posthuman Bodies*, edited by J Jack Halberstam and Ira Livingston.¹ In *Posthuman Bodies*, the Acker text appears under this title, which I think sums up a lot of the anxiety in [Untitled Tape 1]: "The End of the World of White Men." [CF]

485 Lehman Donald Lehman is the name of Acker's biological father, which she discovered in mid-February 1975. "Weill" was her mother's name, "Alexander" her stepfather's, and "Acker" the name of her first husband. "Her mother's husband, Bud Alexander, was present at Acker's birth, and she was named as her father on her birth certificate. Acker always knew that her real father had abandoned her mother when she was just three months pregnant, but during this contretemps [cf. p. 506], Acker learned her biological father's name and occupation for the first time. Her mother's long-ago disappeared lover Donald Lehman was the CEO of Wildroot Cream Oil, a Buffalo-based family business that had been acquired by Colgate-Palmolive in 1959./ Acker never contacted Donald Lehman".²

487 breathing helium This sentence is very hard to understand on the copies of the tapes, due to the poor quality of the sound. Anna Maria Pinaka proposed this reading, which is merely hypothetical.

488 envy for me Hard to understand, due to the poor quality of the sound. It could also be envy follow me or empty follow me.

504 Alan [...] remembers that Acker was sitting outside the door, unable to get in, "talking about suicide and crying" There are a lot of disturbing details about the making of the tapes and how everyone reacted to them that indicate a real problem with negotiation and consent, definitely by today's terms. I'm thinking a lot about Diamond Stingily's poem written in reaction to an old Kathy Acker text and published in DAZED magazine, and how it captures the general silence and weirdness of nonconsensual sex or power play: "I fucked him twice each time he apologized for something. // I told my friend, Kathy, about the encounter, it led to why

1. J Jack Halberstam and Ira Livingston, ed., *Posthuman Bodies*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

2. Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 92.

*I no longer talked to him. // 'I think you were sexually assaulted that second time,' my friend, Kathy, said to me over lunch. / This is a few months later. / 'I think I was too,' I said. I hadn't thought about that until that moment. // 'What are you doing,' I asked him. / he didn't say anything but he stopped. / Our waiter approached the table and asked us for our order. / Kathy and I started another conversation, neither one of us are the type of women to discuss the weather. / I went home later and watched Kill Bill.'*¹ [CF]

1. Diamond Stingily, "Diamond Stingily responds to an archival Kathy Acker piece," *DAZED*, 9 may, 2019, <www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/44366/1/diamond-stingily-responds-to-an-archival-kathy-acker-piece> [accessed 30 july 2019].

[About the Untitled Tape 1]

emily cheng

(ca. 3/1974)

It was three o'clock in the afternoon, Alan was to arrive shortly. I put on my turquoise sweater. The thought of meeting someone *seemingly* as unusual as Kathy made me check myself, and I glanced quickly in the mirror. Alan arrived damp from the rain. I laced up my boots and we were off weaving through the streets to his small apt. on 17th street. We talked about Kathy. Their relationship had started quickly on night after Kathy gave a poetry reading at the St. Marks on the Bowery. They began an intense exchange which continued after Kathy left to go back to S.F. ... Late night phone calls, Alan sending Kathy audio tapes ~~he had done for her~~, telling of himself, his background, ~~everything~~. Alan then managed to get money from RISD ~~to give for~~ a performance (*videotape*) with Kathy. Now she had the money to come back to the east coast. But on getting back to N.Y. it was discovered that Kathy thought of Alan mainly as a father figure, while he thought that he was in love with her.

We arrived before Kathy did and began setting up equipment. Kathy came in and appeared to be quite a bit shorter than in my mind's eye. She had a removed, assuming, but non-offensive air about her, she began moving about, fixing lunch in a quick and efficient manner. Kathy wore a butch hair cut, glasses and had rather full lips. ~~147~~ Alan left to go to the bathroom which was out in the hall and Kathy and I began talking for the first time. Alan's reappearance seemed to hinder our *short* conversation and the two of them began discussing how the tape should open. The camera was propped carefully on a ladder, as I sat on the covered bathtub ready to shoot. The beginning was long and informative about the background of their relationship, concerning the different points of view and their expectations. And of Kathy being an illegitimate and fatherless child who grew up to be a strip-teaser on 42nd st.

and acting in porno movies. WE ~~began~~ started several times when they began bickering. The dialog set a very rational pace but was soon dispersed. The image was a pair of breasts and Kathy's hand fondling them. Alan huddled in a corner with the microphone [2] began talking in a hushed tone so that ~~neither~~ neither Kathy or I could hear what he was saying. *Kathy continued to fondle her breasts at a slow pace.* We later learned that Alan had been talking about the importance of his "Theory of the World" and of drawing power (attention) ~~for~~ from Kathy-(her breasts). It was ~~very~~ successful, the deep voice had an urgency which was very involving.

Nine hours later, of virtually eight hours of shooting, Alan and I left the apt., Kathy wanted to be alone so she stayed behind. We hadn't eaten since lunch and I was starved. Neither of us said much, I was emotionally and physically drained. We had dinner at Jimmy Day's and sat by the window relaxed and just looking around.

The most tiring portion was the blow job (of course) but exhausting to me because I was holding the camera on an inverted cereal bowl and trying to move it with as little jolting as possible. There was no tri-pod to be found that day.

Alan and I were having one of our usual telephone conversations, he was telling me about his new relationship with Kathy, and of doing a videotape with her. It was then arranged that I would do the shooting of the pieces. The next day Alan and Mike Metz dropped by because Alan wanted to "warn me" of some of the things he had in mind. (Would I be freaked out if Kathy gave him a blow job...as he talked about the theory of

the world...) Now I was prepared for anything. It's so hard to organize even one day, of 12 hours, together.

Emily Cheng 1974.

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The text reproduced here is a 2-page typescript with handwritten corrections, digitalized and sent by Emily Cheng to the publisher on November 16, 2018.

Pages are unnumbered.

Cheng's handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to our pagination.

This text was probably written soon after the making of the first of Sondheim and Acker's tapes, ca. March-April 1974.

Notes.

511 **porno movies** *Kathy Acker doesn't talk about her experience as a sex worker in the tape. Is Emily Cheng confusing some conversations she had or overheard with Acker? Or were some takes not included in the tape? Alan Sondheim claims there was no rushes, all that was shot is in the tape. Emily Cheng suggests: "As far as why the part of Kathy as a sex worker, was not in the tape...is beyond me. But my writing is quite specific and detailed, so I am certain that she said that during taping. Whether it was recorded or not, or why it does not appear in the tapes is not clear. Was it rewound and taped? Did she decide then that she wanted to start over? That is possible."*¹

1. Emily Cheng, email to the editor, August 1, 2019.

[Untitled Tape 2]

alan sondheim

kathy acker

(3/1974)

[Two different fonts have
been used to transcribe:

Alan's voice

Kathy's voice]

[medium shot of K, seated] I met Alan Sondheim about three weeks ago the last night I was in New York and spent the evening with him talking about certain similarities that we had noticed between ourselves both gestural and mental and at the time we decided to do a piece together though we didn't specify what piece and when I got back to San Francisco I started well actually I had been doing for a number of months certain sort of weird memory experiments and I started writing a piece which I called breaking through memories into desire in which I simply wrote down all the memories that I had about Alan before I had met him that is we had various friends in common and I knew of his work and my friends had told me about him and about his work and I just wrote all this down I thought it would be sort of a boring array of facts I wanted to see what my intentions were that is what intentions or desires of mine underlie my memories or memories' structures and I came out with a fairly and to me surprisingly emotional passage oh let me say first that I don't know who my father is he left my mother as far as I know that's what my mother says when she was three months pregnant and until recently whenever a man has tried to act fatherly to me or in any way patronized me I have always totally rejected him and only recently as I began doing the memory stuff have I become interested in exploring my feelings about my father my memories about my father and what who my father might be

[1:00]

[2:00]

[medium shot of A seated; K talking off-screen] my recollections of the leader would gathered me into the fall that sunny october afternoon are textural pictures of Alan blowing his brains out on a saxophone and making shrieks moans wits and toots with sober concentration and puffed out cheeks his idol was Charlie Parker Alan yelping in pain my boyfriend put his foot through his coat a japone kode kodo a japanese string instrument similar in concept to a zither Alan with his half inch long fingernails rippling through a free form classic on his guitar or just wanging on a blues national it was fascinating to try and make music out of nothing but ideas spirit and several different freaks experimenting with instruments voice percussion and [?] synthesizers being a lead singer mediocre but competent blew my persecution complex and inflated my ego that is until Alan married his wife and started working with [?] I have been enmeshed in some shattering discussions lately where former Beatles fans have totally cast aside their fascinations for John and Paul because these two have incorporated their wives into their entertainment image giving us John and Yoko and the Plastic Ono band and Linda Eastman and Paul with wings proponents of the cold seeking to unseek these gods maintain that the women have totally ruined their men Yoko with her weird women's lib and Linda with her self-conscious egocentricities to relate this discussion to my narrative as far as I was concerned Alan's introduction of another female singer who didn't have perfect pitch but happened to be his wife to steal my scene and undermine

[3:00]

[4:00]

my singing ideals finished my career June didn't just sing she was allowed to recite poetry ad lib and actually take solo spots weaving quite a dramatic scenario around the performance often she would come out and just announce a song globe globe and eighties or the world tonight will continue after a great [?] of story or better schloppy grummy and crumbly and the audience willingly would achieve immediate rapport with her I was jealous not only that June compounded the problem there was also the fact of the synthesizer a member of the group made a machine which you could sing into and someone handling the controls would turn your voice into the most cacophonous string of crashings and echoings that was ever heard scientifically the machine was an advancement over the sign waves generator which had been previously unused acting as a drone by emitting strong variable notes constituting a background sound to fill in gaps between notes however the synthesizer distorted my own precious voice beyond belief into something ugly to my ears no doubt it fit the bill by constituting a public menace which could serve to make people uneasy there by altering their state of mind indeed Alan could control the audience's moods by subtle virtue of the sound he manufactured on his machine however something was being created musically which bore no relationship to the initial interactions of the musicians it is hard to say if Alan and friends are still investigating new possibilities he is engaging himself at more serious pursuits teaching undeclass girls at the RI school of design I sit in the country with a

[5:00]

[6:00]

child who has chickenpox

[medium shot of A and K, sitting] o ok

you sent me that letter about three years ago

no

then I haven't seen you

I don't remember sending you that letter I think it was written by someone else I think you are trying to make me forget who I am

I know who you are you used to sing sing sing in a group that I had

no I didn't

you're just trying to take power over me

I had power Jesus Kathy! you're just I mean you're forgetting the whole thing I had power over you then I used to tell you what to do and you heard exactly whatever notes I told you to do and you're just forgetting that whole thing

Alan!

and you're try trying to make this whole tape in a fantasy

no

and it's not

fantasy

remember I was the girl that you had an affair with two years ago and you thought I was your father

[7:00]

what! I

you did! you had this crazy fantasy that I was your father

my father is dead! I don't even know what he

looks like! how anyhow

no because I have short hair and because I wear sunglasses and because I act in a very

you had the

most amazing butch image on stage!

that's why you thought I was your father

but you're great now you're great you

had the butch image on stage

no that was a different scene that was something else

that?

I used to sing in that night club remember?

yeah I remember

the Gondola

yeah

but not with your group

my group!

in Providence!

in Providence right the Gondola the Gondola

yes right the night club yes right

right I almost feel like saying [?] in nineteen fifty five

but I

wasn't that was when you were with June

Kathy you you've got me Jesus Kathy I know I was with June you've got me totally fucking confused I

[8:00]

what was that? what was

don't know what kind of games you're playing

I'm trying to tell you what happened

and you've been playing these games since you got

here

no you've been playing them I mean you've been trying to convince me that I'm your father

I think

you're reading something into the letters I wrote you

no

I'm I'm positive

I mean you just said it you said

it twice towards the end I mean the sentences are right there you said that I better be your father or

you'll hit me you said that to me you want me to go I'll go get the letters

ok go get the letters ok Kathy

Acker lead singer of rock group [?]

I was not!

go get the fucking letters! go get the letters don't say any or give me the shit
 we don't have all night to do this tape go get the letters

Alan you're just I can't [9:00]

Kathy it's you're upstaging me again we
agreed we were doing a certain thing you were

I can't fight against you anymore I just can't I mean

do you wanna sing?

I just

don't I don't I can't do anything

like we used to?

we I just can't fight I just you've won that's all there is to
 it you're just gonna get more and more powerful

I just I'm just gonna hehe come on I want to hear that again
it's

true you're just gonna take power completely and as you do you're gonna get more and more defensive

and that will be it

[close-up of A's genitals; hands play with the genitals, pushing, tapping, stretching them; A's hands; K murmurs off-screen.] I'm

sitting here in a corner and neither Emily nor Alan can hear me this piece is between you and me and has nothing to do with them they can't hear what I'm doing I want you to listen to just to me to my voice only to me I don't want you to pay any attention to Alan's ball they are not interesting I want you to take your eyes off the screen and listen to my voice I'm the only person who is interesting around here I want to seduce you I want everything every bit of love you can give I want you to love me completely and that's all that's gonna happen this is my piece this isn't Emily's piece and this isn't Alan's piece this has nothing to do with them this only has to do with me and you I want to touch you in every way you want to be touched I just want to get at you in any way you want to be got at I want you to do anything you want with me you have my voice now this voice belongs to you I want to tell you about what I am doing I want to tell you about everywhere I touch myself don't look at Alan Alan's not interesting only listen to my voice my voice is incredibly beautiful my voice is the most wonderful thing you can hear listen to me I want to tell you what I'm doing I'm trying to remember everything I'm trying to get to every one of you I want to tell you about what I'm doing I'm trying to figure

[10:00]

[11:00]

out how everything works I'm trying to figure out how I get to each one of you I want you to know each one of you know my cunt my breasts and my legs and my ankles and my thighs I don't want you to know anything about Alan you've nothing to do with Alan you only have to do with me I want each of you to love me don't look me more than you look everyone else to concentrate completely on me all the time to concentrate completely on me all the time I want each of you to be with me to listen to me not to watch the monitor the monitor isn't interesting at all there is only my voice my voice creates images for you you can see my voice and any image that you can see in the floor that I see the tablecloth that I see and the boots that I see everything that I see you can hear my voice and my voice is everything for you I'm telling each of you that I need you so much I'm so lonely I'm sitting here all alone huddled in a corner I'm just trying they are trying to take that screen away from my piece they are trying to take my piece away from me but they can't do that I've got to talk to you you've got to listen to me you've got to concentrate to make completely I've got to keep telling you how I need you I need you completely and you need me you need every part of me you need what I can tell you about how my memory works how I see how I feel how we relate everything in the world you need me to tell you you need this voice completely I've got to keep going I've got to keep telling you everything I've got to tell you not to watch Alan not to watch Alan at all

[12:00]

[close-up of A's ass; K's fingers touch A's asshole; K moves her hand around A's ass and touches his asshole] *lo lo lower lower-* [13:00]

er ah that's good a little higher higher no no higher ahhhh no no that's good that's real good auvvvvv fuck shit what were you doing you're just trying to hurt me auw oh that's much better oh just like that oh nooooo that tickles ah don't stop ahahahah you're getting good ahahahahah auvvvv- [14:00]
www oh oh jesu oh no don't stop don't stop this is ridiculous ahh uhllh that's much better that's much better lower a litt a little lower jesu are you even listening a little lower auvvvv I knew you are doing this to hurt me oh that's much better ahaha aaaaaah that tickles stop it stop it no in the center in the center just in the center it tick tick shit this isn't getting [15:00]

[medium shot of A, sitting] *I felt very depressed after after watching this tape and watching what I think is Kathy's Kathy's taking advantage of me shit it's it's ridiculous because I mean I'm not normally very interested in my body and here she was I mean obviously she finds in interest in which parts of my body arouse her which parts hurt me and I mean that's just not interesting to me at all what's what's interesting to me is the power in the situation I mean ok I just feel I just shit I just feel like I was being totally manipulated in that and that I* [16:00]

think this is what I think I mean these are Kathy's pieces in the tape and I just think that this is fuck! that I just I know I'm not being clear ok that this is what she's really trying to do in the tape she is ok what she is really trying to do she is really trying to take me over and I just feel I have to say this she is really trying to take my power away from me and I mean part of it sexual because I can just I I don't get any sexual pleasure from obviously from the way that she touches me and oh fuck a lot of bad things have been happening and I shit and I I just I feel that you know I can give her a lot more pleasure than she can give me she is so used to like to using her body publically I just don't think she can relate to her body at all and I just don't like being you know I don't like this kind of or I just don't like this kind this fucking sexual warfare she just keeps laying on me I just I mean this is supposed to be a parody and this is not and I just don't know how to handle this kind of shit anymore this whole goddamn thing has been really depressing will you cut the fucking thing?

[medium shot of K. sitting.] I just I don't want to make this into a Virginia Woolf thing but I just want to comment about what Alan just said when I came here from San Francisco for whatever reasons I was just looking for some kind of tenderness and feeling tenderness towards Alan and I just didn't have any other thoughts in my mind than an you know just some kind of warmth or feeling being passed between

us and it just from the first moment I saw him in the airport like just there was no tenderness no giving out nothing I mean I didn't even know how to react and then he came on me with this well I should have known he talked about the power shit in the beginning over the phone he mentioned it two it three times it just didn't make any sense to me and and then he kept talking about power and control and all I kept feeling was that I was giving out these feelings very simply and just not even a question of love or anything but just wanting to touch him to be touched and there was just no reaction I walked into an apartment where it was just a garbage all over the floor and there was no place to sleep and I was made to sleep on this mat on the floor and there was no food and I had this horrible ulcer and there was no yet absolutely no feeling for me and he just kept talking about power and I just see this as I mean just his way of getting sex that's all there is to it and and I don't understand what's happening but I just I guess I'm an idealist and I want too much affection from people that's all it's about and obviously people just don't want to give me the sort of affection that I give them and and what can I say? I mean I thought that this whole tape was going to be about some kind of love or tenderness and all it's about is how we are manipulating each other and controlling each other that's all

[19:00]

[20:00]

[medium shot of K standing in front of a refrigerator] I think everybody should buy love's body by Norman O Brown
 [K laughs until the end of the take] [21:00]

[medium shot that pans out to show K lying naked on a bed] for the past year I've been working on various memory experiments which are continuations of my diary work I started out a number of years ago thinking that the only way I could ever know anything was to start with a knowledge of myself and from my consciousness and I started trying to write down everything possible that passed through my mind and notate all of that and after a while well not so much I got bored with that but I got bored with constantly being inside myself and feeling as if I was trapped inside myself and so I started trying to think of ways I could extend the notion of self that is simply how I could get from myself to someone else and I first began sort of naively taking [camera pans over K's genitals and legs; As head enters the screen, he's licking K's feet] oh that tickles other people's stories [22:00]

and and transforming the third person of the stories as if it was a sociological document into first person I took a story by a girl I know named Kathy Kat when I worked as a stripper she worked with me that she had told when she was on acid a lot of the women who worked strippers were took a lot of acid and a lot of reds and whites and simply wrote down the stories best I could remember I would have taped it but I thought [23:00]

if I brought a tape recorder into the dressing room in which we all worked there would be a distance between me and the other women that wouldn't allow me really to hear their stories and however when I wrote down the story I kept the eye of the story and I didn't explain it was someone else's story ^[camera follows A's head as it moves up K's legs, A's head is over K's genitals; we see the back of his head; K speaks into the microphone] so it would seem as if the story was about me it's rather an incredible story um she had when she was sixteen she was in jail for whatever reasons I don't know and she knew karate at the time she was a brown belt of some degree and because she was that high she was her hands and her feet were registered which means if she ever used them in a fight she could be arrested for carrying an illegal weapon and so uh she was in jail and she said that she's a very tough little kid she is very beautiful by the way she had long blond hair green eyes absolutely tiny just beautiful and uh she was very she felt she was very tough at the time she didn't want anyone ordering her uh around and the black women in the jail ran the jail according to her and she didn't want anyone to tell her what to do but one day everybody was watching tv and the white women were watching one show and the black women wanted to watch another show sooo she be so um the black some black women changed the channel of the show so that the black women could see the show they wanted and Kathy Kat changed the channel back and the black women changed the channel again and Kathy Kat again changed the channel and

the black women changed the channel and Kathy Kat changed the channel black women changed the channel
 Kathy Kat changed the channel and the black women went at Kathy Kat and Kathy um didn't know what
 to do 'cause her hands and her feet were registered so she just took stood against the wall and took all the
 black women's beating of her until finally the other women in the jail yelled for Kathy Kat to defend herself
 and the next thing she knew she was um opened her eyes and the black woman's brains were all over the
 floor and she ended up going down into solitary for three months while she was on trial and she thought there
 wasn't a death penalty because she was a juvenile but she thought she would just be sent to prison for more
 than her life to some she said what was the worst dump in all of California and after three months finally
 a matron stood up for her and said that she had been acting as in her own self defense anyway I told this
 story in the first person I told some other stories like this and just collaged them together as if there were all
 about myself and sent them out to various magazines that was the last time I ever sent any of my work out
 to magazines to see if people publish me I only sent them out to one a friend of mine had knew the people
 publishers and recommended them and then and from one woman in fact Carole Bouget who is editor of a
 magazine called Center I don't know if it's still running or not she sent me back a totally vicious note saying
 that how dare I sent her this material and did I know what her magazine was about which I did and I should

[25:00]

[26:00]

be ashamed of myself and I must be some kind of maniac so I just wrote her back a note saying go fuck
 yourself when I'm more famous than you I'm gonna see that you get fucked in the ass or some kind of shit
 like that not that I mind being fucked in the ass so Carole Bouget sent me back a postcard saying I love
 your power and I thought she was just some nut and forgot about it and I'm over well it was Eleanor Antin
 a friend of mine who lives near me who had told me to send this stuff to Carole Bouget so I'm baby-sitting
 for Blaise Elly and David's kid one day and I look in the mail and there is this thing and I start to look at the
 handwriting and there is my scribbled note to Carole Bouget like a month later so I umm look at the
 thing in Carole Bouget sent this letter at Elly's saying this poor maniac sent me this thing and I didn't know
 what to do so I sent her this very nice note back she must be absolutely crazy this is the usual kind of letter
 after rejection I receive from my the people who send me material and there was this letter from Mrs Richard
 Emily Hill that said dear Carole Bouget thank you for your most interesting criticism I really enjoyed hearing
 from you and here is a dollar or something for a subscription to send her and she said compare this note to
 this scroll I had made to her you know telling her to go fuck herself and of course we all laughed after
 that but it was the last time I ever sent any material to a magazine but nevertheless I continued doing this
 ummm made-up the various extensions of autobiography but finally got into umm this rather six months long

[27:00]

[28:00]

experiment and which well what I did in a sense was to try to make myself as schizophrenic as possible oh
 that feels so good I just decided that well on the one hand I'd I if I was thinking about memory there I [29:00]
 I have to stick with this if I was thinking about memory I would divide memory into three categories which
 would be that it be ah ah I can't even remember it be learning retention and recall and you can
 only test retention through recall so it would be learning and recall and I'd simultaneously first recall various
 memories it didn't matter what there were basically about this guy Dan Graham shit and then that of
 course that's what would my identity would be based on which is pretty amusing ahhh ahhh that feels so
 ahh and ahh and it's also copy this book so it would be like a learning process in which only I changed the [30:00]
 third person of the book that is third person in relation to myself to to first person so I'd be learning
 these new memories about myself and of course it would be a question of which memories ahhh ahhh which
 memories were valid and I'd be of course confusing my identity completely and in fact questioning and also
 exploring the rigidity of ahh ahh ahh [K screams loudly as if she were having an orgasm]

[medium frame on Alan making his fingers run all over his body, as an explicit parody of Kathy's caressing her limbs in the first tape]

This [Untitled Tape 2] was created by Kathy Acker and Alan Sondheim on the day after the first one¹, ca. mid-March 1974. It is a black and white Sony EIAJ tape and was found, as a result of our research, during the fall of 2018 in the collection of Alan Sondheim EIAJ tapes at The Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University, box 35, “acker/sondheim satire/part 1”. We wish to thank Kelly Haydon and the Fales’ staff for their help in tracking the tape and digitalizing it.

The stills from the tape, below, are image transcriptions from a digitalization belonging to The Fales Library. We chose to make stills for these two sequences of the movie, in order to illustrate Claire Finch’s. These two sequences, along with the sequence where Alan eats Acker’s pussy, are the scenes that most differ (visually) from the first tape. None of the frames were cropped, all the images are stills of the full frame.

As we can infer from the title in the archives, this second tape was intended as a satire of the first one. Acker and Sondheim exchange their roles and and mimic one another’s language, actions, and expressed feelings.

The tape has reportedly been lost since the 70s. It was never screened (publicly at least) before 2019.²

Notes:

528 this is supposed to be a parody and this is not This tape flips the other one, which is helpful because it allows us to analyze the dynamics of this crisis in representation. In the first tape, Acker says, I feel that in the last tape when I just watched it it wasn’t obvious to me what I found interesting about the tape that is what I found interesting about the tape didn’t seem to come out This language, “didn’t seem to come out,” points to the image being the culprit: there is a divergence in what was experienced or what was intended, and what is actually seen by the viewer. In many ways this seems to be a confrontation between the text and the visual: how does a description of a cunt differ from an image of genitalia, how is that image framed, how does that image interpellate the viewer? As a fem afab person watching the first tape I feel sucked into a cave of horror that looks like Courbet’s The Origin of the World: the cunt as the ultimate historical and art-historical object, the hole that shoots the Male Artist to his vantage point as the Seeing Subject. Text dissolves in front of the video of normative sex (in the first tape).

I’ll try to describe some of the images to you. In the inverse of the scene, in the first tape, where Kathy’s touching her chest and Alan’s saying “don’t look at her,” we’re, in the second tape, in close-up of Alan’s penis and balls and he’s stretching the skin, flopping the skin around like a puppet. It’s funny to watch. K’s saying I’m trying to figure out how I get to each one of you... and she runs through a monologue in which she describes touching her body. Does the description of the afab body – words like cunt and

1. “Two days in a row” (Alan Sondheim, email to the editor, July 4, 2019).

2. According to Alan Sondheim (email to the editor, July 6, 2019).

breasts – command as much attention as the image of the penis flopping around comedically? This is what she seems to be investigating here and it works pretty well in the parody version because we're pretty used to seeing cocks so the specularity of it doesn't overwhelm the text. The next scene is the best of the parody: K. is fingering A.'s asshole. In the reaction to the [Untitled Tape 1] Emily Cheng describes feeling protective of A's vulnerability and whereas it was hard to feel that when watching the [Untitled Tape 1] it is easier here, such is the power of the asshole. The asshole is a unisex orifice, because of course everybody has one. What IS coded through gender is the privacy that is attributed or granted to that asshole: while the female asshole is widespread pornographic trope, the heterosexual cis male asshole is historically perceived as a site of impenetrability. In his book *Testo Junkie*, Paul B. Preciado links this supposed impenetrability of the het-cis-male asshole to the related "public" aspect of his mouth, his speech: the male, non-porous, emits supposedly trustworthy logic.¹ The penetrable female body is, next to the impenetrable male, more private depository than public orator. So it is meaningful that the parody tape chose the asshole as the inversion to the close-up of the cunt. The tape ends with A sucking off K, and in the parody of the part where A talks about losing control and logic through orgasm, K talks about confusion of identity, not loss: **I'd be learning these new memories about myself and of course it would be a question of which memories ahhh ahhh which memories were valid and I'd be of course confusing my identity completely.** What this mostly unseen [Untitled Tape 2] does is posit the accumulation of multiple identities as the (fem?) antidote to a (masc?) fear of losing the self through losing control over expression. And she leaves us with a protocol for getting there: inhabit third person, inject the self into unlivd and impossible experience, see how this process of multiplying experience mutates the self. I want to say that sex is a major practice of injecting the self into the third person, but as this encounter seems to indicate, sex doesn't work that way or doesn't always work. In which case, what kind of sex do you need to be having, in order to convert it into a tool of collective becoming? As Acker writes in "Lust" (1988): **Whenever you have sex with someone, you partially become each other.**² [CF]

1. Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, op. cit.

2. Kathy Acker, "Lust," in *The Essential Acker*, op. cit., p. 238.



Various Memory Experiments I

kathy acker

(4/1974)

VARIOUS MEMORY EXPERIMENTS I

Kathy Acker

4 / 1974

1. Intentions: change:

Divide my remembering, for functional purposes, into three processes: learning, retention, recall. Can test retention only through recall. Therefore consider only learning and recall:

Experiment: I simultaneously

(1) recall memories about myself. I base my identity, my sense of myself, on these memories.

(2) learn by copying down in writing someone else's written-down memories. Change the third person (third person in relation to myself) of the book to first person: therefore: learn new memories about myself. I base my identity also on these memories.

As processes #1 and #2 become more and more intertwined, certain of my memory structures, such as the divisions I make between 'I' and 'others', are called into question: therefore become clear.

Partial result: I prefer a more schizophrenic (I don't know what other word to use here: I don't mean 'stuck') way of being in (knowing) the world, for I can now begin to change the rigidity of, the rigid mind-structures, political structures I have hitherto accepted.

[2]

(THE CHILDLIKE LIFE OF THE BLACK TARANTULA – already sent out.)

2. Breaking Through Memories To Desires.

[3]

Experiment:

(1) I recall all memories I can about one subject, in this case everything I knew felt heard about Alan Sondheim and his work before I met him. At the time at which I start/ write this, as far as I know, I feel nothing about Alan except a general liking for and interest in him: I met him in New York a few days ago, and spent a night talking to him. (2) I write down whatever I feel/desire, whomever/whatever these feelings desires concern, as I recall memories about Alan.

Result:

My feelings (#2) and supposedly more 'objective' memories (#1) merge. It's clear that my memories (memory-structures) are grounded partly on my desires. I cannot find sufficient cause in my memories for these desires: therefore my desires at least partially cause or structure my memories:

[4] 2/23/74.

First memory of Alan: at UC San Diego ten months ago, friends no acquaintances of mine tell me he's there being interviewed for a job, grant in the music PME program. Or they tell me he was there and he left: I don't remember. I remember at that time his name was familiar to me. Why? David, a close friend of mine there, might have mentioned Alan's work to me, or I had already seen Alan's work in two anthologies: Kostelanetz' which David had given to me, no, shown me, and one I can't remember. Paragraphs about art in 4000 B.C. which I remember strongly. Remember his writing amused and intrigued me. (Actually this writing wasn't his.) Remember Peter (who I now live with: my brother) telling me Alan looked like Graham, had I met Graham yet I met him around 6/1/73; so Peter might have told me this later. I remember: I did know Alan's work because Peter did tell me that the PME people (who I dislike strongly) thought Alan was snobby (too intellectual?: they're dopes), he had fought with all of them. I'm not sure if I remember having wanted to meet Alan, if I felt anything beyond mild curiosity and interest. I was more interested in his work because I heard he was snobby. (Obviously the most complications/questions occur when I examine causes: i.e. why was I interested in this guy's work? Why did his reported snobbiness make me more interested in him? When I report memories which are occurring at the moments I report them

[5] (obviously), not in the perfect past, the content of these memories then occur at the moment I report them; does it (the content) occur in the same world as my seeing the paper on which I write the memory? (Rich, whom I've been fucking past two weeks, calls: I tell him about my new work, he says shit about remembering.

2/25

Now is the beginning of my childhood. This is the beginning of my childhood. Dark, I live in a dark house, on the second floor, all wood; I see a staircase steep pointing down from slightly to the right of in front of me: I'm getting rid of my emotions: this is a fantasy? This is an image I see, I say, due to learned structuring, in my mind, different from the black pen white paper yellow blanket I now see simultaneously; therefore I see different pictures simultaneously (I see different ways simultaneously) pretty much, as I remember, all the time I'm awake. Diffuse seeing: no central image, just as I simultaneously feel everything. I remember last night sitting on Rich's bed, dirty white sheet green blanket, next to Rich kissing Rich's fingers, his left hand? I don't remember, feeling happy I was finally with Rich (I haven't fucked him in eleven seen him in nine days) loving and feeling friendly toward Rich and feeling he loving and feeling close to me, feeling as if I could put my head next to his cock totally satisfied sleeping; simultaneously I feel felt angry? no empty because I wasn't with Alan. I'm scared to say this. I have to say everything.

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The text reproduced here is a 5-page typescript, archived at Fales Library & Special Collections, in the Kathy Acker Notebooks, Mss 434 – Box 3 – Folder 8.

The pagination runs from 2 to 5.

Acker's handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to the typescript's original pagination.

The typescript is composed of two parts. The first one, probably from April 1974, is the description of two experimental processes and of their results; it is reminiscent of the style used in chance operations art to describe how a piece functions and should be performed. The second part consists of two memory texts, dated from February 23 and 25, 1974. Various Memory Experiments *Inputs* an end to the series of experiments focused on memory that Acker had initiated in the fall 1973.

These texts articulate the process she followed in The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula, specifically, and in general, articulate her process of appropriation of other's memories through their "I". They also synthesize the process of Breaking Through Memories Into Desire, thus reinterpreting nearly one year of past work as "memory experiments".

Notes:

541 Experiment: I simultaneously / (1) recall memories about myself. [...] (2) learn by copying down in writing someone else's written-down memories. [...] As process #1 and #2 become more and more intertwined, certain of my memory structures, such as the divisions that I make between 'I' and 'others', are called into question: therefore become clear. *This is a definition of what Acker names in her letter to Alan Sondheim (cf. supra) "doing a TARANTULA": an "intertwined" text, where the intentional incorporation of other memories via the ingestion of biography chips away at the supposed integrity of "the memory structure." And we see here that for Acker this memory structure is exactly the nexus where the sense of the individual is produced. Relation performed by textual contamination can mutate this mechanism of production. This is what she's into and, based on her earlier letters to Sondheim, what she was hoping to do in their planned collaboration, before [Untitled Tape 1]. This letter text comes just after Acker and Sondheim make the tape. It still uses Alan as a subject, but now more as a character, which she transforms into a tool of personal exploration through her description of her memories. While the memory experiments are central to this period which includes the serial work, soon Acker will locate the nexus of I/other in a different object: the dream, not the memory. She writes in Blood and Guts... :*

Dear dreams,

You are the only thing that matters. You are my hope and I live for and in you. You are rawness and wildness, the colours, the scents, the passion, events appearing. You are the things I live for. Please take me over.

Dreams cause the vision world to break loose our consciousness.

Dreams by themselves aren't enough to destroy the blanket of dullness. The dreams we allow to destroy us cause us to be visions/see the vision world.

Every day a sharp tool, a powerful destroyer, is necessary to cut away dullness, lobotomy, buzzing, belief in human beings, stagnancy, images, and accumulation. As soon as we stop believing in human beings, rather know we are dogs and trees, we'll start to be happy.

Once we've gotten a glimpse of the vision world (notice here how the conventional language obscures: WE as if somebodies are the centre of activity SEE what is the centre of activity: pure VISION. Actually, the VISION creates US. Is anything true?) Once we have gotten a glimpse of the vision world, we must be careful not to think the vision world is us. We must go farther and become crazier.¹

Memories aren't enough to do the work that Acker attributes to dreams, here: the work of acting like "a sharp tool, a powerful destroyer." The suggestion, if we follow the logic of the unpublished serial, after we break through memory we touch desire — and desire requires a different form or a different economy: that of the dream.

1. Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in Highschool*, op. cit., p. 36-37.

[Letters to Bernadette Mayer]

kathy acker

(4-7/1974)

[ca. April 29, 1974?]

Nick Piombiono
Bernadette Mayer
17 St. Mark's Place
New York, N.Y.
apt#20

Dear Burning Dot & Nick Name,
spring is here (1:00 A.M ugh) sex sex. Slept w/ 2 wonderful men
in Albuquerque & feel wonderful; left Albuquerque & feel miserable sad. Have to cruise SF: so much work. The hell w/ art & memory: writing pornography again. Lust lust lust overtakes that's what's happening I'm coming up as much as the plants. They don't get all the good things. I'm ready everyone here in me morning beginning LOVE miss you 2 too.

[June 6-15, 1974?]

Dear Bernadette,

I can't write anything either and I'm not even hermetic. Just hermit: don't see anyone, did see Ann and she gave a reading and she was fantastic she's gotten so stud her writing's fantastic now then went to this party where all these people said they knew my work and I gave a friend of mine a blow-job in the bathroom and I met Ed Dorn so I felt totally fantastic knew I wasn't hermit anyone and then next day I went to Mills to type up first part of new series for Bruce but I'm not going to tell you the title and Ashley said "yes you can use the typewriter" so I'm typing away totally speedy and joyous and he says "you can't use the typewriter get out of here" so I go down to public grass then public pavement and lay dow and cry because nobody likes my work and then I get this new typewriter because I can't go thru this shit, please creep can I use your typewriter every month, isn't it beautiful isn't it beautiful I'm in love with a typewriter the fuck with men, \$20 @ month god knows where that will come from bank just closed my account cause too many checks bounce but money doesn't really exist or else it's everything, isn't this typewriter wonderful, and then I typed all day and now Bruce is printing my shit so I don't know how I feel which is usual because I'm not playing anybody. I'm ah hermit. I'm sure you'rea great so I'm sending you great presents which you should get soon whether or not you're fucking God you're fucking God all the time. You're always surviving: flying's the problem and we'll all be doing that soon. But IF YOU NEED ANYTHING ASK SO I KNOW AND CAN GET IT FOR YOU. You hear kid. Want to fuck Tom Veitch

he's giving a reading this week but don't think it's possible Andrei says it's not. And I'm a hermit. Writing all the time none of it makes sense. Did you hear the new Patti Hearst Tanya tape? What are you working on? DON'T WORRY DON'T WORRY DON'T WORRY. ~~Get away from~~

I figured out that I'm nobody that is I'm everything until I imagine (take a stand) which I have to do to answer questions live in people world the trick is to take stands (answer questions live in human world) in way that denies any possibility of answers, living-in-human-world's validity. Sometimes all I can think about is sex, and sometimes I can't think about sex at all

take care Kiddo

love Kathy

*my telephone no: 415-626-2654 (order name Art Povera. Ring once,
hang up, ring again for free call.)*

[ca. July 11, 1974]

Bernadette Mayer
c/o Waldman
33 St. Mark's Place
New York, NY

Dear B,

Main criticism of Wittgenstein: he doesn't allow awarenesses. —
Hear you're at Clark Coolidge's don't know address sure this will
reach you — How are you kid?

Love Kathy

Hiya Anne!

[ca. 16-30 July 1974]

Hi ya Berning Dette I can't think of any questions, I can't think of anything besides Edgar Allen Poe I'm going to write another Poe a Poe story for the next What? TARANTULA NYMPHOMANIAC My new name is the Fleshpots of Sin Return but people are so stupid I might have to keep calling myself Kathy Acker so they believe I'm telling the Truth. I figured it out: when I say I'm Kathy Acker they believe I'm telling the truth; when I say I'm the Fleshpots of Sin Return they think I'm lying. Anyway I'm sending you your present but of course there will be more in the what, time to Come, I'm sure you have this already but it's my obsession and what's more perfect revolutionary wonderful than obsessions? I just made this tape with Elly Antin in which we talk and since I hadn't told her all about what Happened with Alan Sondheim in NY I told her on tape, it was great, it was REALLY NASTY, and it's going to be played (the tape) on KPFA, was supposed to be played last night but KPFA's on strike, and Elly's going to take tape to NY to get played on WBAI so everyone will learn know who a shit Alan is I got my revenge. Edgar Allan Poe would be proud of me. Look at the beginning of THE GOLD BUG. I'm not fucking anyone Peter's in this band called BUTCH WAX AND THE GLASS PACKS he's leaving for Canada for three weeks in a few days to go on tour with the creeps so I'll be all alone and I can't stand the poets here they all right sure-real-pissism I'll have to lock myself up in this house and work harder and harder and harder. O Freud and horniness. But I have this great sleeveless T-shirt which says BUTCH WAX AND THE GLASS PACKS in rainbow colors I was wearing that and my fake black leather pants one day and this guy asks me if I want to be in the movies. Guy is Artie Mitchell.

I don't believe it but maybe in a couple of hundred years I'll get enough money hustle or hustle to publish my evil porno stories/.

The typewriter's doing all the punctuation here.

Here are questions which I'm sure won't exist by the time you read them and will exist in totally unbelievable forms by the time

I read any possible answers:

Are you happy?

If miserable, is there anything I can do? So much for practical questions. More important: What writing you doing now? What problems exploring? THIS VERY IMPORTANT. Who are you fucking and enjoying? Anything political interesting? What else exists?

Me reading lot of philosophy specially Bergmann Gustav much of my work sort of skewily based on his. Blows my mind. Who you reading? Say hello to Peter Stamos speaking of philosophy.

Present dumb poets in SF no read philosophy.

Presnet for you is special GOLD and BLUE which is color of angels as Edgar Poe knows all the time low criminal angels and change no exist

Love love The Black Tarantula

This letter is part of the 15 letters (24 pages of typewritten and manuscript text) archived at UCSD Library Special Collections & Archives – United Artists Records – Kathy Acker to Bernadette Mayer – Mss. 1, Box 1, Folder 1.

The transcription was made from a 2014 scan.

Letter from [ca. April 29, 1974] handwritten postcard with a photo of the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque; we date the letter partially from its postage stamp: “-PM/ 29 APR/ [?]/ U.S. Postal Service. CA 940”, and partially from the chronology of events for the year 1974.

Letter from [June 6-15, 1974] typewritten undated letter. Acker’s handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics. We dated the letter June 1974, based on a parallel passage in *I Dreamt I Became a Nymphomaniac! :Imagining’s* 2nd installment (“I Find an Object for My Desire”) – the manuscript of which is dated June 1974, in NYU Fales Library’s inventory of Kathy Acker notebooks. The June 6-15 estimate was inferred from the allusion to a Patty Hearst tape (Hearst was kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army [SLA] on Feb. 4, 1974), which is very likely the June 6 communique by the SLA, left outside radio station KPFK, in which Hearst (aka Tanya) is featured.

Letter from [ca. July 11, 1974] handwritten postcard (the card itself is from Canada); we date it from its postage stamp: “15PM/ 11 JUL/1974/ U.S. Postal Service/ CA 940/”.

Letter from [ca. 16-30 July, 1974] typewritten letter on pink paper, without date. We date it based on several pieces of information: according to Chris Kraus, Peter Gordon joins Butch Whacks & The Glasspacks during the summer 1974,¹ and the band seems to have been touring in Canada during the same period (a manuscript letter from Peter Gordon, sent from Vancouver to Acker is preserved in the Duke Library Collections); the mention of Alan Sondheim and New York ensure that the letter comes after March 1974; the “present” could be the two first installments of *I Dreamt I Became a Nymphomaniac! :Imagining* (the text is alluded to at the beginning of the letter) which Barbara Baracks and Laura Chester had both received in the first half of July (cf. letters from both at Duke University Libraries, David M. Rubinstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library – Kathy Acker Papers – Box 30). Acker’s handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

This letter seems to answer an earlier card from Bernadette Mayer to Acker (reproduced below, and archived at Duke University Libraries, David M. Rubinstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library – Kathy Acker Papers – Box 30). The postcard bears the postage stamp “JUL 15/ 5 PM/ 1974/ New York/ NY/ 10001” and the following addresses: “Bernadette M./ c/o Waldman/ 33 St. Marks/ NYC 1000” – “TBT/ 46 Belvedere/

1. Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p.113.

San Francisco/ Calif 94117"). Mayer's July 15 card responds, itself, to a July 11 postcard from Acker. Mayer writes:

Dear BT: I aint at Clark's I'm at Anne's. 33 St. Marks till August when I go to Clark's. So, I got this dream workshop going on with Dr. Montague Ullman thru July – he runs Maimonides Dream Lab. And, anyway, where're all my presents! It' hot + quiet here. No men, or, hardly any men. One cannot eat in the awareness of heat but continues to get fatter. Everybody's away. New book great but make em longer! Write me it's too hot to write here but if you send me a list of questions i'll answer em, Take care Love B.

Notes:

548 The hell w/ art & memory: writing pornography again. Lust lust lust overtakes that's what's happening. [...] Sometimes all I can think about is sex, and sometimes I can't think about sex at all. Pornography is the bridge that we'll cross to get to the next set of Acker's work: the longer *Blood and Guts...*, and *Great Expectations*. We're talking about "pornography" not "sex." Pornography puts us in a whole different economy than actual sex does. Dennis Cooper writes that "pornography is not about that which it appears to observe, i.e. sex. It's in fact intimate with human beings, its components, though not necessarily the stars of the movie one's watching. They're just the wardrobes sex has adorned for a certain outing."¹ The inhabitation of pornographic codes is like dreams, in this sense: it allows for an accumulation of selves, for a whole stack of what Cooper calls human "wardrobes" (personal experiences, narratives) that Acker will use as material to sculpt her forthcoming myths. [CF]

548 Albuquerque As Acker mentions in her second letter to Alan Sondheim, ca. February 23-28, 1974, she had been invited by "Terry" (?) in Albuquerque for the last week of April: Terry just called : Albuquerque's for the last week of April, date unset as of yet.²

549 and Ashley said A parallel passage appears in *I Dreamt I Became a Nymphomaniac! :Imagining's* 2nd installment.³ As she states in the same letter, she was writing "the new series" at that same moment (which lets us infer that the letter was written in June 1974, like the manuscript of *I Dreamt...*'s 2nd installment – cf. supra): I ask Bob if I can use the typewriter. All day and night. "Yes." The ribbons I have don't fit: I buy a new ribbon. I'm typing away; Bob asks if I'm going to use the typewriter today and tomorrow, he has some work. "Just today I'm typing new book I've got a deadline tomorrow." "You'd better let me use it: you can use it later tonight do it all then. Get out of here." Everyone's looking at me: I gather my stuff get out. Down steps to where everything is green and yellow. Peter (my brother) yells at me

1. Dennis Cooper, "Square One," in *Writers Who Love Too Much*, op. cit., p. 235.

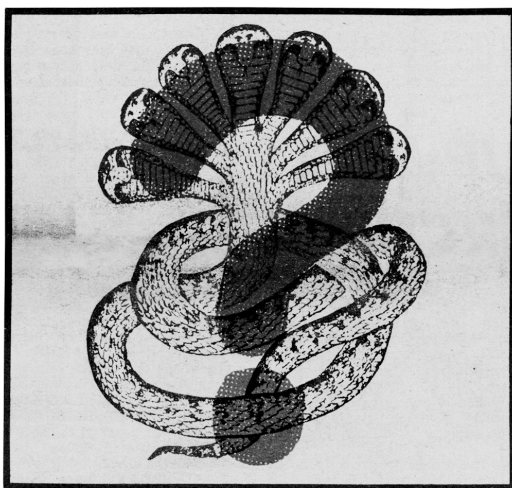
2. Cf. supra, p. 446.

3. *I Dreamt I Was a Nymphomaniac! :Imagining*, 2nd installment: "I find an object of desire", feat. in *Portrait of an Eye, Three Novels*, Kathy Acker, Grove Press, 1998, p. 110.

because he and I are doing a book with Bob I'm not acting professionally'. I walk across thick grass to car: I don't make it plop down on sidewalk and cry. I'm a poet and what I do is sacred. The people who keep me from the few lousy instruments I need to disseminate this crap are evil. They're using the instruments for business. They've no regard for those activities which are sacred.

549 money doesn't really exist *Parallel passages: \$ doesn't exist*²; "Money doesn't exist, of course. Don't worry about it; I don't. I just want everyone to love me. To love me and you"³.

550 Patti Hearst Tanya tape *It could be an allusion to Patty Hearst's speech featured in the SLA's (Symbionese Liberation Army) June 6 communique left as a tape outside radio station KPFA. We include Patty Hearst's entire speech, below. It constitutes "her" (?) answer to the killing of SLA activists during the May 17, 1974 police shoot-out.*⁴ *In the present volume, it serves as an example of American 60-70s revolutionary guerrilla rhetoric, which had a performative, aggressive style that can certainly be compared to Acker's. It also serves as an example of modern conversion rhetoric: Hearst's kind of "I become a revolutionary," regardless of whether it was fiction or reality, surely would have touched Acker. Finally, it reminds us of the romantic idea of terrorism that Acker had until the 70s: I used to be a total romantic about terrorism. Blood and Guts*



The symbol of the SLA with a question mark, on the front page of the Berkeley Barb, February 22-28, 1974 (reproduction available on <www.voices.revealdigital.com/cgi-bin/independentvoices>).

FREE PATTY!

1. According to Peter Gordon, he, Acker and Ashley never made a book together. But the sentence could allude to the radio show *Hi Art* on KPFA-FM they all three directed together for a few months (email to the editor, July 7, 2019).

2. *Journal Black Cats* *Black Jewels*, cf. *supra*, p. 208.

3. *Rip-off Red, Girl detective*, April-June 1973, Grove Press, 2002, p. 9.

4. A digital copy of the tape can be found on *The Past Daily* website, Gordon Skene sound collection, <www.pastdaily.com/2018/01/06/name-tania-past-daily-pop-chronicles/> [accessed on May 3, 2019].

was just like: “Let’s just blow the whole thing up.” A scream, right? I think that I saw the terrorists as the screamer¹. Peter Gordon expressed a similar enthusiasm, writing to us: “I was fascinated by the Patty Hearst kidnapping story. It was all over the news and media at the time, in particular in the SF Bay Area, where the whole thing took place. The revolutionaries would communicate their demands through cassette tapes sent to local radio stations, who would broadcast excerpts on the regular news programs and would interrupt programming as new communiques would arrive. [...] I composed a piece *Greetings from the SLA*, in which for the first part I dubbed a Patty Hearst communique onto one track of an 8-track recorded. In the remaining tracks, I had the voices of friends, such as Jill, Blue Gene, Phil Harmonic, etc., repeating the Hearst text as they heard it. This was mixed into stereo, with the multiple voices coming in and out. The second part was Kathy, solo, writing in the voice of Patty Hearst.”²

Patty Hearst’s declaration³:

Greetings to the people, this is Tanya. I want to talk about the way I knew our six murdered comrades because the fascist pig media has of course been painting a typically distorted picture of these beautiful sisters and brothers. Kahjoh [Willie Wolfe] was the gentlest, most beautiful man I’ve ever known. He taught me the truth that he learned from the beautiful brothers in California concentration camps. We loved each other so much and his love for the people was so deep that he was willing to give his life for them. The name Kahjoh means unconquerable. It was the perfect name for him, Kahjoh conquered life as well as death by [?] and fighting. Neither Kahjoh or I had ever met an individual the way we loved each other, probably because our relationship wasn’t based on bourgeois [blank] goals. Our relationship’s foundation was our commitment to the struggle and our love for the people. It’s because of this that I still feel strong and determined to fight. I was ripped-off by the pigs when they murdered Kahjoh, ripped-off the same way that thousands of sisters and brothers in this fascist country have been ripped-off by people they love. We mourn together and the sound of gunfire becomes sweeter. Gelina [Angela Atwood] was beautiful, fire and joy, she exploded with the desire to kill the pig. She wrote poetry, some of it on the walls at Golden Gate, all of it in the LA pig’s files now that expresses how she felt. She loved the people more than [?] for anyone’s person

1. Conversation of Acker with Dean Kuipers, at Gramercy Park Hotel Bar (NYC), July 2, 1988; pub. in Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Melville House, 2018, p. 59.

2. Peter Gordon, email to th editor, July 8, 2019.

3. The symbol “[?]” stands for words not discernible on the tape.

and material comfort and she never let her mind rest from the strategies but at the blood of revolution. Gelina would have yielded firepower to the people if there wasn't the necessity to whisper the words of revolution. We laughed and cried the struggle together. She taught me how to fight the enemy within through her constant struggle with bourgeois conditioning. Gabi [Camilla Hall] crouched low with her ass to the ground, she practiced until her shotgun was an extension of her right and left arms, an impulse, a tool of survival. She understood the evil in the heart of the pig and took the only road that could demoralize, defeat and destroy him. She looked at touched people with a strong not delicate embrace. Gabi taught me the patience and discipline necessary for survival and victory. Zoya [Patricia Soltysik] wanted to give meaning to her name and on her birthday she did. Zoya, female guerrilla, perfect love and perfect hate reflected in stone cold eyes. She moved viciously and with precaution understanding the peril at the smallest mistake, she taught me: keep your ass down and be bad. Fahizah [Nancy Ling Perry] was a beautiful sister who didn't talk much but who was the teacher of many by her righteous example. She, more than any other, had come to understand and conquer the putrid disease of bourgeois mentality. She proved of and that she was unwilling to compromise with the enemy because of her intense love for freedom. Fahizah taught me the peril of hesitation, she shoots first and makes sure the pig is dead before splitting. She was wise and bad and I'll always love her. Cinque [Donald DeFreeze] led the people with tenderness and respect. They listened to him when he talked because they knew that his love reflected the truth and the future. Cinque knew that to live was to shoot straight. He longed to be with his black sisters and brothers but at the same time he wanted to prove to black people that white freedom fighters were comrades in arms. Cinque was in a race with time, believing that every minute must be another step forward in the fight to save the children. He taught me virtually everything imaginable but wasn't liberal with us. He would kick our asses if we didn't hop over a fence fast enough or keep our asses down while practicing. Most importantly he taught me how to show my love to the people. He helped me see that it's not how long we live that's important but how we live, what we decide to do with our lives. On February 4th, Cinque Mtume saved my life. The Malcolm X combat unit of the SLA was a leadership training cell under the personal command of general field Marshall Cinque. General Teko was his second in

command, everything we did was directed toward our development as leaders and advisers to other units. All of us we prepared to function on our own if necessary until we connected with other combat unit. The idea that we are individualists is absurd, as long as any SLA elements are alive and operating under the command of our general field Marshall. It's hard to explain what it was like watching our comrades die, murdered by pig incendiary grenades. But the [?] pig facing a fire team of guerrillas and the only way they could defeat them was to burn them alive. It made me mad to see the pigs looking at our comrades' weapons, to see them holding Kahjoh's forty-five and his watch which was still ticking, he would have laughed at that. There's no surrender, no one in that house was suicidal, just determined and full of love. It was beautiful to hear Gabi's father, he understands. Gabi loved her father and I know that much of her strength came from the support he gave her. What's the difference between the parents of Gabi and Kahjoh and my parents? One day, just before the last tape was made Kahjoh and I were talking about the way my parents [blank] he said that his parents were still his parents because they had never betrayed him, but my parents were really no [?] I'll never betray my parents. The pigs probably had the little Olmec monkey that Kahjoh wore around his neck. He gave me the little stone safe one night. I know that the pigs are proud of themselves, they've killed another black leader. In typical pig fashion they have said that Cinque committed suicide. What whore shit. Cinque committed suicide the same way Malcolm and King and Buddy and Fred and Jonathan and George did. But no matter how many leaders are killed, the pig can't kill their ideals. I learned a lot from seeing the comrades who died in that fire, and I'm still learning from them. They'll live on in the hearts of minds of millions of people in fascist America. The pig's action that Friday evening showed just how scared they really are. They'd have burned and bombed that entire neighborhood to murder six guerrillas. The SLA terrifies the pigs because it caused all oppressed people in this country to arms, to fight in the united front to overthrow this fascist dictatorship. The pigs think that they can deal with a handful of revolutionaries but they know they can't defeat the incredible power which the people once united represent. It's for this reason that we get to see wide and in color the terrorist tactics of the pigs. The pigs saying you are next. This kind of display however only serves to raise the people consciousness and makes it easier for our comrades, sisters

and brothers, to make the country to connect. I died in that fire on 54th Street but out of the ashes I was reborn, I know what I have to do, our comrades didn't die in vain. The people's lies without the advice [?] surrender have only made me more determined. I renounced my class privilege when Cinque and Kahjoh gave me the name Tanya. While I have no death wish I've never been afraid of death, for this reason the brainwashed [?] pig Hearst has always amused me. Life is very precious to me but I have no delusions that going to prison will keep me alive and I'll never choose to live the rest of my life surrounded by pigs like the Hearsts. I want to see our comrades in this country's concentration camps but on our terms, the stated in our declaration of revolutionary war, not on the pigs' terms. Patria ou muerte, venceremos. Death to the fascist insect that preys upon the life of the people.

In I Dreamt I Became a Nymphomaniac! :Imagining, the SLA serves as one costume that allows the narrator to express her revolutionary ambitions. The epic and heroic dimensions of the guerrilla war led by the SLA is portrayed as impressing Acker's characters; Peter, the feminine character of the 2nd installment, dreams that she is one of those heroes: Every night I dream I'm a member of the SLA I'm hiding from the police I can't figure where to hide. I don't know how most people exist, for they don't have parents like mine." [...] "I'd never thoughtfully do anything this society approved of. I admire Tania, Yolanda, Teko, Cujo, Zoya, the others who were willing some did lay down their lives for their visions. I wish I had their courage."¹ But, the SLA's demands are fundamentally aiming for the unity and equality of all "races & people & political parties" moving against the artificial oppositions and differences defined by the "ruling capitalist class"², thus affirming one humanist identity and the necessity to fight seriously and heroically for it. Acker's "I" playfully invents a more radical unpretentious SLA, aiming to reveal and enact the dissolution of all identities and to cast any impersonation as a mask among others: As a poet I'm actually an agent for the SLA. My mission is to reveal the uncertainties, unimportances, and final equivalences of all identities. Transformation to what? What changes are necessary will occur despite fear and greed. I'm not interested in being a hero. I've nothing to say, nor teach. [...] I have to decide whether I'm an SLA agent or a woman transvestite who's wildly in love with the most gorgeous fag in town. Obviously I'm a woman transvestite who's wildly in love with the most gorgeous fag in town.³

551 Wittgenstein Cf. supra, *Conversations* and the editorial notes.

1. *I Dreamt I Became a Nymphomaniac! :Imagining*, Kathy Acker (self-published as a six installments serial novel in 1974), feat. in *Portrait of an Eye*, Grove Press, 1998, p. 114.

2. *Declaration of revolutionary war & the Symbionese program* 8 21 73, The Symbionese Liberation Army, August 21, 1973 (tract).

3. *I Dreamt I Became a Nymphomaniac! :Imagining*, op. cit., p. 111-113.

[Postcard to Kathy Acker]

alan sondheim

(ca. 7/24/1974)



Dear K.

The sun has come up in the country, we are here, and everything is beautiful. Finished my novel a while ago & Rosemary has done an incredible drawing, one of the best I've ever seen. Animals: dear, woodchuck, mice & rabbits that the cats catch. Received your book & liked the repetitive material, kept rereading looking for holes and additions. Spoke to Coolidge on the phone, he's heading west for a month — his N.E. coolness disarming & somewhat boring. Bernadette's taking his house for Aug. Heard she's fine... Got another card from D. Graham, c/o Baracks this time. See R. Kostelanetz, he's doing something w/ Metz & Henry Horn called Assembling Press. Or so it seems. Will know more in a while... Not much good reading around, a novel called Simon Stern by Cohen w/holds my intent & some phenomenological aesthetics by Dufrenne. Working hard in Otego, best, Alan.

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The text reproduced here is a handwritten postcard (standard format), signed "Alan" (authenticated by Alan Sondheim). It is addressed to "Kathy Acker/ 46 Belvedere/ San Francisco/ 94117"; was stamped "Otego, NY 13825/ Jul. 24 [?] PM/ 1974". The front of the card is an image titled "Baby Cottontail Rabbit/ ©1969 by Leonard Lee Rue III". It is archived along with a xeroxed copy of a letter from Acker to Sondheim (starting with "Dear Alan,/ hope this reaches you...", cf. *supra*) at David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library (Duke University) – Kathy Acker Papers – Box 30.

Notes.

563 Dear K. When you break up with someone you always wonder if beauty and presence can make up for the psychological sludge uprooted. Alan Sondheim seems to be trying to focus on presence here, anyway. The sun has come up in the country, we are here, and everything is beautiful. Acker's work flashes through scenes of sparse beauty-in-presence, and abjection. Is beauty or abjection, good experience or bad, the more effective tool for collective becoming and transformation of the individual's 'I'? I don't know, but Acker does make a connection between abjection and the exertion of one's individuality. In her copy of Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* Acker has handwritten: to make myself, I abject, refuse what I desire. Why? To separate myself from the other, to make an 'I'. ('Eye'? can one see oneself? Do we only see when separate? Does one write in a state of somnambulism?) In Acker's upcoming books we become somnambulists with her, moving through dreams and following desire. [CF]

563 somewhat boring Alan Sondheim asked to clarify that he doesn't "feel this way at all now" about Clark Coolidge (email to the editor, 31 March, 2019).

[Letters to Bernadette Mayer]

kathy acker

(10/1974 - 10/1975)

11 oct 1974

Dear Bernadette you creep you never write me I never write anyone either how are you? I've got a huge request to ask Anne said to write you she gave a reading here with Ginsberg McClure Duncan McClure and Duncan wearing matching suits and vests Ginsberg who wore a tie!!! Di Prima Meltzer Kyger Di Prima's boy friend who once stayed at Honeymoon Hotel (residence of Fear, Tyranny, Gold) but it was too hippy for him and among all these STARS Anne stole the show no surprise so later I interrupt Anne's good mood to ask about my stupid problems she says O.K. but write you this is problem: I'm bopping around Mills I see Bob and say O my god I'm so scared I've got to do something at St. Mark's December I don't want to read it bores me it's already happened I want to talk but not as star-fascist o my god what am I going to do how am I going to get ideas across be funny not turn everyone off etc. he says I'm so scared to I've got a performance a week from today in Paris I don't know what I'm going to do I'm going to talk to Parisians talk so much they'll all yell at me. Can I be in your performance at St. Mark's? I'm so happy I reply yes now everything is perfect because I love Bob. But then I find out he can't be in NY until after January 15. Also Peter who I live with is gigging with this big rock-and-roll band and they're touring Chicago D.C. NY it turns out January 13 through February so it turns out if I go to NY January 15 onward I have to pay only minimum plane fare. Especially I wasn't sure how I'd get plane fare in first place. So REQUEST: CAN BOB ASHLEY AND I DO PERFORMANCE AT ST. MARKS's ANYTIME BETWEEN JANUARY 15 AND END OF FEBRUARY. I KNOW

THIS IS BIG NUISANCE CHANGING MY SCHEDULE AND IF
NOT POSSIBLE OF COURSE I'LL DIO IT DEC. 11 CAUESE [2]
I REALLY WANT TO BUT IF POSSIBLE BOB AND I COULD
DO TOTALLY TERRIFIC ASTOUNDING EVENT IF POSSIBLE
IF POSSIBLE. O you know who Bob is what he's done shounld
I go through the rigamarole: *typewriter just broke down so much for
rentals: ONCE group, SONIC ARTS GROUP, worked w/ Cage last year
w/ Cunningham etc. etc. ad nauseam.*

*How are you kid? Where are you living now? I'm great I don't see any-
one but musicians no poets I should but I don't rock-&-roll is sure wierd
but new world all new worlds good by nature. Nature. I work hard
thoughts of revolution all time even if is romantic & silly also great
show with Peter & Bob on KPFA. Had this lousy flu for last 6 weeks.
Constant thoughts of revolution:*

*Doesn't matter if you don't write cause I figure out you're great. Have
2 parakeets: one named Revolution & other named Art. I say "Hi" to
them.*

Love TBT

[ca. October-December 1974]

Dear Bernadette polemic humm I don't know it all doesn't fit together anyway & polemics are supposed to fit together but. Well get back to this I sure hate criticism.

(1) I love Hannah's work & would love to read with her. The reason I asked about Ashley is I'm no longer reading (in the readings I give here at least) I just do sort of live performances-things but you see here it's easy cause all my friends who are on the same trip I'm on so when a performance we just say O another performance & have fun. I just don't have as much fun reading stuff which is already written (dead?) & hearing only my own voice. But in new york I can't say to someone hey I got a performance coming up want to do it with me, so I gotta take SF to NY. M Also (2) money is a problem. No more phone here, to get money for my books Peter & I are borrowing, begging, & not eating cause Peter's father don't have no more money. The last one is a real bitch (#5) money wise. By the way #6's going to be the hottest one of all: I'm using some of them (like #5) to clarify, slow down, cause it's all one piece need different energy/time continuums.

O.K. so here are requests/solutions:

[2]

- (1) Would Hannah be willing to read either Jan. 15 or Feb. 19 with Ashley & me? that could be best cause even if Ashley & I got only \$100. I'd still be saving \$ cause I got free transportation to NY beginning of Jan. & only beginning of January.
- (2) If not: cause Hannah's feelings are real important in all this mess & I did commit myself long ago to Dec. 11, is there any way of getting money (not out of the church I know that!) but say NY State Emergency Artist Loan? (Other readings?) You see we thought (Peter & I) things were gonna be better \$ wise by

December but now they're worse than ever & I don't know when they'll break. (~~& will do performance later on~~) Otherwise, have to do performance Jan. 15 or Feb. 19. with Ashley.

O.K. Sorry this is total bother.

O re boringness of books: I don't take criticism very lightly: Being (me) in SF where all poets are thought-less due to Duncan & McClure craptrap & not being in NY where some poets still think etc.

- [3] I'm stating the case rather strongly, I'm sick of beautiful words word-phrases etc. or politically which is why I have reservations about 4rth NYMPHO tho since I ripped it off (all the NYMPHO's by way are totally ripped off but too boring to list books I've copied) it's O.K): a writer writes some great work which is great cause X readsit & X says right that's how things are. Image. Pattern. Form. Then X goes ~~has~~ percieves Y says yeah just like the book. Image. Creating images. My friend Farley put this personal in a newspaper "I'm not losing my mind I'm giving it away"; some guy Farley doesn't know, Farley found out, went around repeating those words i.e. transforming himself according to those words; Farley says to me that his (Farley's) words are successful. I don't know you see I suspect fascism. Telling people how to see. Extasy, I don't trust it. Better remain cool even boring present my shit says there it is take it or leave it. And open up. Possibilities for all kinds of language: "poetical" & mathematical & propagandic &... why not be polemic? why be ~~also~~ always the fucking same thing?
- [4] why do so many "poems" look & sound alike whereas when I go into a bookstore I see all kinds of shit & their writing don't look the same. Why shouldn't writing be everything? ~~Is dif~~ It's different times/time-beings too: as "Blue" Gene says, up to now everyone's

been climax oriented, that's not longer feasible, why have beginnings ends better worse good bad divisions. So I send out stuff once a month so I have only 30 days to write printup send out each book so I force myself to stop worrying whether it's good or bad. Though I worry about everything. That's no longer important. Just the why 's important. And the opening up. (I.e. Ideas are most important etc. don't cover over ideas w/ fancy writing). Blah blah.

My sex life more complicated than this so I'll tell everything in person. All the time I'm confused. What the hell. Who's Peggy. I like men as long as they don't talk too much don't tell me what to do act too macho (manly?). I haven't fallen in love in a long time I miss it. Will be wonderful to see you & talk I'll be in NY a long time this time. Wish NY could clean up so I could live there. Love love

More about your new work please send.

Thinking again: problem with NYMPHO series I see is I haven't accepted fully enough language I'm using which parallels my fear of other people.

[5]

Also recap: would Hannah want to change date of reading with me?

Or: is emergency Artist loan NY state possible? (& I'll have to read o dear back to the old ages!)

Or: just have to change date,

all possibilities O.K.

Thank you for being so nice especially as you haven't especially like NYMPHO series I wish things weren't changing so bap bap all time best to just stay calm I don't know: I want to see you & see your new work I'm not Marxist Marxists think a person gets

food because the person works I want to get food because I need food. I do.



I figured out my male stars are David Antin, L. Weiner, Ashley, Peter. Dan Graham on outs. You & E. Antin my female stars.

[ca. October-December 1974, #2]

THE BLACK TARANTULA
46 BELVEDERE
SAN FRANCISCO, CA. 94117

AIR MAIL
Bernadette Mayer
c/o Greenberg
65 2nd Ave.
#5G
New York, NY
10003

Dear B. – Feb. 19 fine – Now BA says he can get to NYC only
on Jan. 15 so screw him I go to all this trouble make you upset &
pissed & then Ashley says only on 1/15 screw that everything all
messed up no money & now this creep Jack Briece conned me out
of my last \$30 puke love TBT

[ca 15-30 December 1974]

Bernadette Mayer
c/o Greenberg
65 Second Ave.
- Apt#5G
New York, NY
10003

Dear Bernadette, will be in NYC around 1/14 in time for opening of Elly Antin's show – you probably don't want me around for a month or however long I'm in NYC but I'll stay with you as long as you like – thanks! – and also for reading w/ Hannah which is real good – Christmas cheers talalatalalala love TBT

1 Oct 1975

Dear Bernadette, Good to hear from you and glad you liked the book – when's the baby due? I've got a new address too: ~~532~~ 341 East 5, Apt. #4, 10003 (533-6217) but mail might as well be sent to the old address, your old apartment (413 East 9) my lousy typing since I have doubts about this new mailbox, it seems too accessible, maybe I'll it'll get taken on a moral charge, morals charge, me as mail male, this new apartment real nice especially since Peter away in Calif. I have the whole place to myself and haven't been seeing anyone just lounging in loneliness and enjoying it for the first time in a few months I'm not in love and am enjoying the peace doing a lot of reading especially Dickens whom I enjoy more each time I read him also my newest trash a bunch of TRUE ROMANCE mags I got cheap at the thrifty book store and, what else? haven't seen any poets lately the few people I see for whatever reasons are artists I guess I got so scared by all the furor last year or I don't know reasons are so easy to invent I want to get away from NYC for a while hope to when these books are over for some reason they're being a strain on me much more than any of the other series money is totally terrible not only for me but for everyone I know the money art scene except for the "blue chips" seems to be perishing it's really scrounge time penny grabbing not even pinching cause hthere's no chance to save anything everyone's real hungry all the time and the city is even more falling into whatever new depths occur I think I'm beginning to believe in true love probably cause I don't see anyone did you like Connie's book? o a close friend of mine is in desperate trouble what was that emergency fund from which you got money for

Charlotte C. last year? and how does one go about getting it? how long will you be up in the country? what work are you doing now? how's Lewis? say hello to him. what other news it's all daily life trivia and then the big myth of NYC decaying and true love and between those extremes, well I do my yoga etc. do write and I will take care and love to your baby

Kathy

*o I'd love any books—
Charlotte's fine, samples
of your new writing, terrific*

EDITORIAL NOTE.

These letters are part of the 15 letters (24 pages of typewritten and manuscript text) archived at UCSD Library Special Collections & Archives – United Artists Records – Kathy Acker to Bernadette Mayer – Mss. 1, Box 1, Folder 1.

The transcription was made from a 2014 scan.

Letter from ca. October 11, 1974 typewritten and manuscript letter, undated but bears a date added by Kathy Acker with a pencil at the top of the first page. Numbers in the interior margin correspond to our pagination. Acker's handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Letter from ca. [October-December, 1974] 5-page handwritten letter on blue, lined and perforated paper. Numbers in the interior margin correspond to Kathy's pagination.

Letter from [ca. October-December, 1974, #2] handwritten postcard. On the front: an illustration by Arthur Rackham (1867-1939) from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* that reads, "They all crowded around it panting and asking 'But who has won?'" The card itself was published by The Green Tiger Press, La Jolla, California. Postage stamp is faded; bears Kathy's personal stamp "The Black Tarantula/ 46 Belvedere/ San Francisco, CA. 94117".

Letter from [ca. December 15-30, 1974] handwritten postcard (with a picture of San Francisco's new shopping center, Ghirardelli Square). It answers a postcard from Bernadette Mayer, which had a picture of the Empire State Building on its front, and was postmarked from New York on December 14, 1974. Mayer's postcard, archived at the Duke University Libraries (David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library – Kathy Acker Papers – Box 30) says:

Dear TBT —

To let you know, as you know, old Tarn cancelled out, so, now,
you get to read with Hannah, again, as planned — good news!

Also, would you like to stay here (in my large apt) while in town?

let me know soon, love to [?] you + love Bernadette

Letter from October 1, 1975 typewritten letter. The date was added by Kathy Acker with a pencil though the rest is written in black ink. Acker's handwritten additions and corrections are reproduced in italics.

Notes:

566 Honeymoon Hotel "Tyranny" is Blue Gene Tyranny, and "Gold" is Rich Gold, both artists and musicians. The Honeymoon Hotel was "a short-lived collective house where Blue Gene Tyranny, Phil Harmonic and others lived." (Peter Gordon, email to the editor, cf. *supra*, p. 333).

568 criticism Acker did receive some critiques from Bernadette Mayer. In a letter to Kathy Acker, probably from October-November 1974, Eleanor Antin brings up

the version of the situation that she heard from Melvin Freilicher. Although in this version, the word in question – referring to Meyer’s evaluation of Acker’s work – is remembered as “didactic” instead of “polemic”.¹

Dear Kathy

Heard from melvin about the evil wind from the east (Bernadette). ~~As David says~~ Proving, once again, that David is usually right since he never really liked her. Somehow whenever he sees her he finds himself trying to bug her because he thinks not well of her. An instinctive response since she is always friendly to him. We both believe her freak-out is pure sexism. As David says “Bernadette is not liberated” I refer to the old man so much since I never met her. Don’t know her at all except for the poetry. I find the remark about ~~the~~ your poetry being didactic interesting. As if that were a put-down instead of the reasonable behaviour of an intellegant artist living in the U.S. in 1974. She must be an abstractionist as well as a nasty creature. Kathy, they cant stand the fact that really interesting and alive art can come from anywhere but ~~the~~ those few blocks in Soho that they call home. They hated me, – their counterparts in the art world – for walking 100 BOOTS into MOMA. It’s like making it without going through the apprenticeship. When I bring my show to Staffanotty this January I shall be doing a performance ~~in which~~ (probably the second week the show is up) as the King in which I attack them for having made me miserable all these years. And I’ll show them up for the fake-outs they are. They’re the New York art scene? Me, with my New York accent and they all come from the mid-west. I walked that city from end to end. Its my city. I’ll revenge both of us, all of us. And we’ll win, Your already a figure in the art and poetry world. Dont let them worry you with their pettiness and old-fashioned ideas. I forbid my beloved Kathy from worrying one inch about those creeps. And the King is not used to being disobeyed.

[...]

568 no longer reading Acker expressed her distaste for the New York format (at least at the Poetry Project) of readings in other places. The idea of the poet as creator, spreading his precious written words to the public, didn’t please her at all. She was more inclined to create “performances” than to rely on literary originality. It probably started on the West Coast. In a letter Barbara Barack wrote to her on July 10, 1974 we can read Acker’s distaste, along with Barack’s point of view: Notice from poetry

1. Letter from B. Mayer to Kathy Acker, typed, archived at David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library (Duke University) – Kathy Acker Papers – Box 30.

Project newsletter you'll be reading here next year. Will be a gala event — I can see it now — tho I don't see why you don't like reading. For me, when I'm reading my work I see what I'm writing while I'm reading almost entirely in terms of quantities of energy; so I get a metacritical look at my own work in terms of how much energy or lack of it (like being blown thru a wind tunnel) I'm getting at any particular moment. So the intensity of the reading becomes a mirror-image of the intensity when I was writing the piece.¹

575 Chris Kraus tells us about an impending lesbian triangulation of doom in which Acker gets all tangled in the aftermath of Mayer's affair with Anne Waldman. However their relationship ends up, it's instructive to look at the overlaps between Acker and Mayer, since the ties between them point to a historicized point of feminist avant-garde innovation, developing in a shared environment. I'm looking again at Mayer's 1982 *Midwinter Day*, because it gives us a template of fem environmental writing, of documenting experience through time and trying always to hold that material up against the existing (patriarchal) version of valid experience:

Love is the same and does not keep that name / I keep that name and I am not the same / You, / Shakespeare, Edwin Denby and others, Catallus, / I've nothing else to say, the anonymous / Blue sky is gray, I love your being / In my unresisting picture, all love seen / All said is dented love's saluted image / In the ending morning, nothing said is mean, / Perhaps it's too long, I'm only learning / Along with love's warning / To invent a song / Then for the breath of words respect / Me for my dumb thoughts, speaking in effect / This was my dream / Now it is done.²

When you don't have a history of words what you do have is your existence in time. Maybe this is one of the reasons that Acker continually takes on narrative time, trying to jump in and out of temporality. Acker: Because we're apart, our sex because it has to continue, is false, imaginary. Line nine. Love makes me dare. I'm coming, masturbating in the darkness. Line ten. Blind. Because I love you I want to die. My main verb is orgasm in the mythological past tense; in the realm of blackness the mythological's more powerful than the temporal present. (What is the time model of my will?)³ Where Mayer writes female perception as temporal residue and makes it epic, Acker uses orgasm to escape from time totally, evading, at least temporarily, the way that patriarchal literature historically refuses female people access to event. [CF]

1. Letter from B. Baracks to Kathy Acker, typed, archived at David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library (Duke University) – Kathy Acker Papers – Box 30, folder 5.

2. Bernadette Mayer, *Midwinter Day*, op. cit.

3. Kathy Acker, *Don Quixote*, op. cit., p. 51.

[Songs]

jill kroesen

(1974-1976)

FAY SHISM BLUES

BY JILL KROESEN

FAY: JILL KROESEN POETRY PROGRAM

DOG: LEONARD NEUFELD 2 PM



I want to be your leader
I know about that you're undecided
but I'm the best for the job and you know you can't deny it

I want to be your leader
I want to see you lose your freedom

If I dictated your every move
I would have this world running oh so smooth



I'm the prettiest girl you've ever seen
and I'm the smartest genius that's ever been

I want you to tell me you love me
that no one's above me

If you obey my every command
I will pet you with my delicate little hand



I have a pink bathrobe and long blonde hair
I know I don't look like a head of state but darling I'll be there

I'll drive you crazy with my shoulders
and when I've got you hooked I'll turn you over
to my secret police and you'll be working for me

Honey you look like you're just my type
if you'll feed my ego I'll stay with you tonight
and in the morning I'll tell you to go
I'll have cut you down to the ground while you built me up
Honey I won't need you anymore



I want to be your leader
I want to plant the seeds of
oppression, repression, I want to see you crawl for your concessions

I'm going to step on everybody that gets in my way
If you so much as give me a dirty look I'm going to make you pay
I'll send you to jail yes I'll send you to jail
and you won't get any visitors and you won't get any mail

If I don't like the color of your hair
I'll put you on trial and it won't be fair
I'll fix the jury and I'll bribe the judge
and you won't even be able to carry no grudge
cause when they reach the verdict, it will be for your death
and I'll be waiting to enjoy watching you take your very last breath



Lenny and Kathy (1975)

Times were very rough
Didn't have much in our savings account
She came by one day
wanted a loan
You gave her the full amount

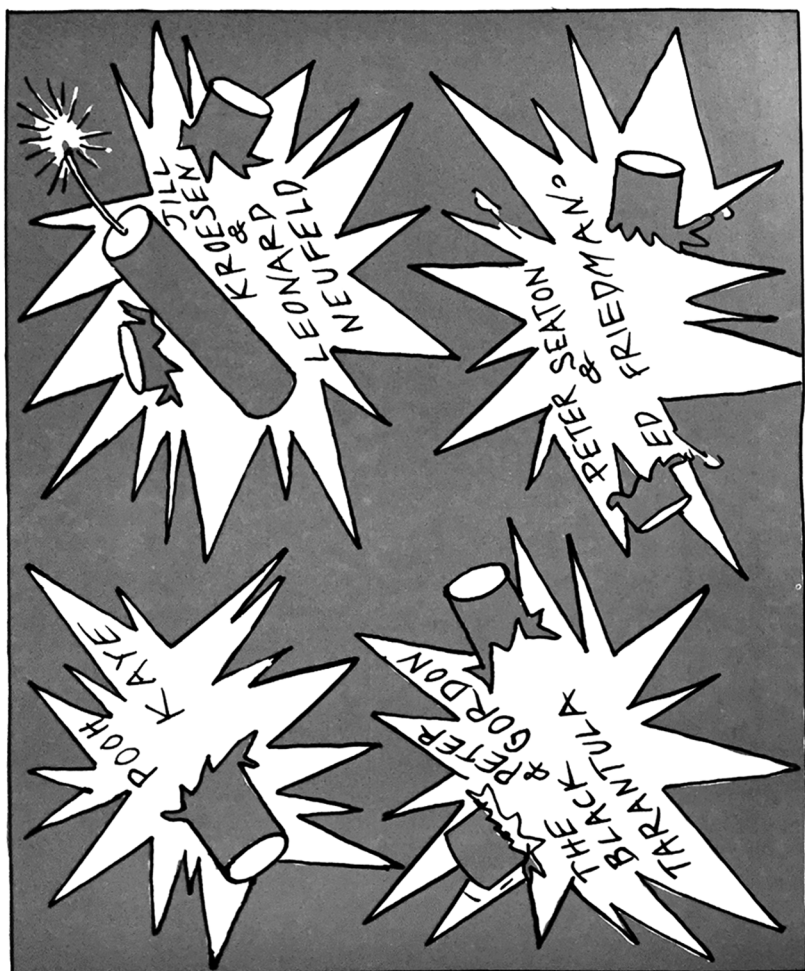
You came when I was feeling down
You acted so sweet
that I fell on the ground
You said you'd been left
by a lady a while ago
You loved her for 5 long years
but you didn't love her anymore

I said you
You want me
not her?
He said I sure do
I said I don't know
He said I know that is true

He said he loved me
that nothing could stand in his way
So we got married
within 90 days.

We were happy and doing just fine
She came into town and asked him for the time

He looked at his wrist, said girl you can have my watch
He put in round her wrist she looked pleased by his touch.



**ST. MARK'S
CHURCH**





THE POETRY PROJECT

JULY READINGS

**2ND AVE. & 10TH ST.
FREE**

MONDAYS - 8:15
WEDNESDAY READINGS BEGIN FIRST WEEK IN OCT

1975	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	1975
			1	2	3	4	5	
6		7	8	9	10	11	12	
13		14	15	16	17	18	19	
20		21	22	23	24	25	26	
27		28	29	30	31			

THURSDAY WORKSHOP
W/ LEWIS WARSH @
THROUGH JULY @ 8:30

Pelvic Inflammatory Disease Blues by Jill Kroesen ©1976 Jill Kroesen.

Handwritten musical score for "Pelvic Inflammatory Disease Blues" by Jill Kroesen. The score is written on five staves in G major (one sharp) and 6/8 time. It includes lyrics and chord symbols (A, D, G, A#, B, B+, C#, D6, C#m, B) above the notes.

Lyrics: I want to be free I've been in my house for six weeks I got P.I. D. I went to the Doctor He said I can't help you but I'll take your money no one

knows what's wrong w with my o-ver-y —

My sanity is suffering, I'm hanging by a thread.

I want my health back, don't want to be dead.

can't do my life's work, can't make any bread.

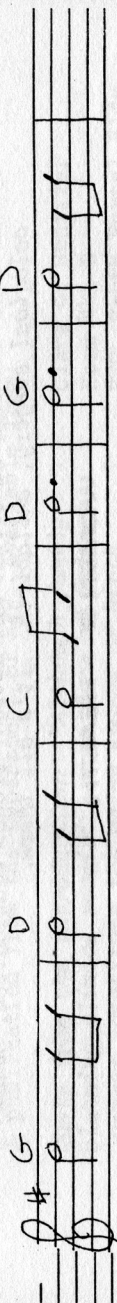
If I had a baby, ^(her) I love I would dread. Cause I'm in

pain, pain, pain, I'm in

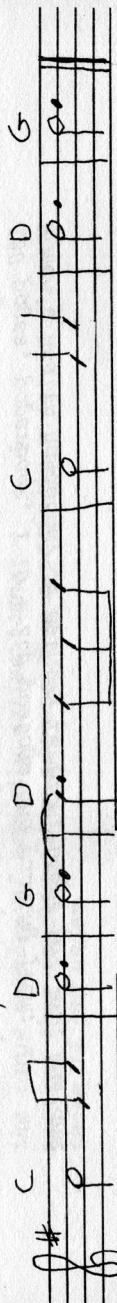
pain, pain, pain.



I — want to be free — I've



been in my house for six we — eks I got P.I.



(Goddess)
Lord
won't you please he — (c)al me —

May 24, 1976

Prince Charming Blues for Kathy Acker

- (C7) I think I'm gonna see
 (F7) something so
 (C7) soon
 (F7) that's gonna satisfy
 (C7) me
 (C7) I can't get no satisfaction
 (F7) I can't get no satisf~~a~~
 (C7) faction
- (C7) I had a boy with a penis as long as a kitchen knife
 When he tried to fuck me I thought I'd lose my life
 I left him for a gorgeous man whose ~~dick~~ was short and fat
 but oh my god he comes too fast prick
- (F7) I can't get no satisf~~a~~
 (C7) faction
 (F7) I can't get no satis-
 (C7) faction
- (G7) Just to find a boy whose=right~~whp~~
 (F7) ain't gonna take my life a-
 (C7) away
- (C7) I had a boy who said no when I said yes
 I had a boy who said yes when I said no

I had a boy who was dirty mean and low
I had a boy who was a saint but went everywhere I go

(F7) I can't get no satis-
(C7) faction
(F7) I can't get no satis-
(C7) faction

(G7) Just to find a boy who's right who
(F7) ain't gonna take my life a-
(C7) away

(C7) I had a boy who said go when I came
I had a boy who said stay when I ~~add~~ to go
I had a boy who said I'll catch anything you throw
I had a boy who said honey when you see me coming you'd better duck low

(F7) I can't get no satis-
(C7) faction
(F7) I can't get no satis-
(C7) faction

(G7) Just to find a boy who's right who
(F7) ain't gonna take my life a-
(C7) away

EDITORIAL NOTE.

These songs were composed by Jill Kroesen. We transcribe and reproduce them from digital copies provided by the author.

Jill Kroesen is an artist. She was close friend of Acker, Peter Gordon, Leonard Neufeld and Robert Ashley in the early 70's. At the end of 1974 she went out with Leonard Neufeld and they married on February 22, 1975. They "were divorced about 6 months later". According to Jill, Acker was constantly calling and coming over when she and Lenny were married. Before that she also had gone out with Peter Gordon for a few weeks until he decided to go back to Acker with whom he stayed for some years more.

Fay Schism Blues *Black and White flyer, from November 1974, with the text of a song by Jill Kroesen. Was intended for the first execution of a performance with Leonard Neufeld, "Fay Shism Blues Begun in the Home", at the New York "XI Annual Avant Garde Festival of New York", on November 16 of 1974.*

Lenny and Kathy *Transcription of a song by Jill Kroesen, from 1975. Talks about Kathy Acker and her relation with Leonard Neufeld after Neufeld had married Kroesen.*

The Poetry Project July Readings *Poster, in color, created by Jill Kroesen, showing the program of Monday readings at St. Mark's Church Poetry Project in July 1975. Performances of Pooh Kaye, Jill Kroesen & Leonard Neufeld, Peter Gordon & The Black Tarantula, Peter Seaton & Ed Friedman are scheduled.*

Pelvic Inflammatory Disease Blues *Score of a song by Jill Kroesen, dated from 1976. According to Kroesen, the title originated from the fact that Acker had PID at that time.*

Prince Charming Blues *Song created by Jill Kroesen "for Kathy Acker", dated from May 24, 1976.*

1. Jill Kroesen, email to the editor, April 13, 2019.

[Flyer for tapes projections at the
Whitney Museum of African Art.]

alan sondheim & kathy acker

(11/16-21/1976)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART
NEW AMERICAN FILMMAKERS SERIES

Tuesday, November 16 through Sunday, November 21

RED ART BRIGADE (1976). By Alan Sondheim. 10 minutes.
THESES AFTER MARX (1976). By Alan Sondheim. 11 minutes.
Untitled (1974). By Kathy Acker and Alan Sondheim. 58 minutes.
Total Running Time: 79 minutes.

Notes excerpted from The Structure of Reality by Alan Sondheim:

"1. The Approach of a Stranger in the City
The problem reduces to this: A, finding him or herself opposite to, adjacent to, facing, within the personal proximity of, B, a person unknown, and B in relative opposition. All of the analyses must emphasize this situation, imagined or real, located indoors, outdoors, in a subway, on a sidewalk. Perhaps he is impatient. Perhaps she has outlasted a certain span, an ambiance. Perhaps there is a sense of anger hovering about one or the other, or a sense of futility. Certainly there is no warmth in the situation, no possibility of communication, no guidelines. The characters remain bound: he, unable to move or speak, she might scream, defeat him, deny him, or a form of humiliation; she, fixed on the space before her, or to one side, or the other, or downwards at an indefinite distance, unvarying. The door closes upon them while the room grows cold. Or others of their kind. But no kindred. The problem reduces to this, the analyst faces it on the way to work,

or coming for a meal alone. Always a he and a she, always a she and a he facing them.

The analyst returns home to the apartment where he lives alone. There might be comfort in his marginality. He is capable of description, the act of writing about, the act of sailing on a surface. His thoughts illuminate the page. Or is it destruction? Beyond which the mind stops. Unable to retain interest in "this sort of thing." Eruption, no eruption. Now only the sound of his. Limit. He hungers, moves out to the restaurant. They are there, not waiting for him, waiting for him. He stares fixedly at his food.

2. It's Not Our Fault

It's not our fault. It's not of our own creation. Nothing went wrong, either. The civilized always possessed their own conditions. Or at least occupied their spaces. The structure we were born into, like waking up with raw flesh, moving on salt, the skin stripped. We could watch or not, as we chose.

What did they expect, if not those "disorders of personality" when an absolute blank is reached? Against the edges of the structure? There was nowhere to rebound. Our historical position...

We were not meant to be here, we were not meant to be somewhere else. There are all sorts of silly questions, of course; we could go on indefinitely. Such as, if not us, who then? We were never elsewhere; otherwise, how could we have asked these questions? It all seems in circles, oppressive circles.

There is something autonomous, that's for sure. As if it were just above our heads. A larger organism, swollen with its own history. We can't tell: Do we crawl as if beneath its belly, or are we part of it? These questions sound absurd; none of us has enough to eat... What have we done to merit this? We sleep at night, or in the day;

we walk about on the earth, move our arms, hands, eat, excrete, copulate, run, sit, lie, turn, spit, scratch, at various times, the body like a slowed-down blur. Sometimes the actions run against the metal, plastic, or wood; our speech moves freely through the air or alters nearby communications channels. Everything is effected, responsive levers in the environment. This is the common denominator; even a leader can only carry out the same group of actions, one after another, or in a different order. So that organism lumbers overhead, none of us has created it; our actions are all the same everywhere. The tanks shriek only to themselves, the wires whisper or yell – we don't have all the words yet – to each other, moving various circuits, changing things, one way or another, none of us is sure, none of us has the circuits, the map of the circuits, none of us affects, shrieking, the tanks shriek only to themselves, the levers carry their own responsibility, the channels are swollen with their own histories, sometimes we're given – a gift – one word or another, there's always room on the list, room for another, our incomplete dictionaries of explanation, we are permitted to speak...

[2]

3. Flight

You could get away from the situation, on occasion; sitting in a comfortable chair, lamp and television in competition, you would work on the axiomatics of set theory, the foundations of logic. You felt, would feel, the process of a universe under creation. You thought: 'extension.' As if it could be carried further. As if there were another bridge, another place to go. Proudly I would stroll across the room. It was a small space, a low ceiling. I pointed out: That in the procedures of your logics, which was to extend everywhere, in a fine network, there was only a psychological reduction

to a relative safety; that the logic had not been created, as if born, reborn, from a series of axioms or axiomatic formations; that it had been the result of a dialectical collapse, the universe in upon itself, until the only escape was certainty, an absolute sureness, that existed nowhere else; that the price of this certainty was impossible restriction; that its reward was safety, a temporary loss of memory, an escape... My pride resided in my metaframework, think of it! The two of us, you involved in continual calculation, and myself, in its critique: the two of us: in mediating opposition: the situation! situation! Lying elsewhere, just out of reach, as if higher than that ceiling, or taut against the near wall of the farther room: that situation! the limit-point of endurance! the impossible closeness of mass-death, all that we had dreamed, the writing of the dreamer. Did I do my country an injustice, devising these matters? either the limit-point of the calculation, either the calculation or the critique, either the critique or the limit-point, fearing the word 'death' fearing it the word 'death' in fear or fearing? As in a castle to behold or dwell within or mention in a phrase or story.

4. From 'Theses After Marx'

II Thinking is practice; an internal reorganization of the world is necessary in order to avoid the inactivity of neurosis. The process of thought resulting in a textual ideology is the beginning of the process of transformation. Textual ideologies are capable of changing the world; they structure the individual, interconnecting his dislocated behavioral surfaces. Texts and martyrs are identical.

III The current transformations of society must be seen in relation to the media superstructure in which reified information, representing the weaning of abstraction from the historical dialectic,

alone exists. As follows: the Self is lost in the appropriation of this information (through acquisition of broadcast programming, use of the telephone, and so forth); the Other is recognized as tokenized, abstracted, and incapable of personalized communication (the Other remains, isolated from the Self, within the Set). The weaning of abstraction is a collapse of time; the moves within the barriers of a Newtonian present. The Self remains imprisoned in this situation – another aspect of the process of tokenization.

V The abstract, in its embodied structurations (religion, economics, cybernetics, etc.) is neither theory nor practice, but process dislocated ontologically from both consciousness and materiality. Opposition to the abstract may be subsumed within it; the abstract, through the application of metaframeworking, may contain contradiction. It is timeless. It is usable.

VI Contextualized existence before essence: the resolution of the non-fixity of objects within shifting frameworks. Revolutionary practice becomes the ability to shift frameworks against frameworks, affecting the transformations of consciousness. The creation of a street disruption is useless; the creation of an ambience for a disruption, and a manipulation of its after-effects, is valuable: the horrifying effect of confusion.

[3]

IX These theses lead to the analysis of society in terms of a “cybernetics” which emphasizes semi-autonomous strata within strata-topologies. These are not hierarchical structures, but threshold-logic networks in which nodes are multiply-interconnected. This cybernetics is essentially an-ethical; it contains no prescriptives as to the ultimate forms or goals of social organization. But it readily lends itself to an ethological/ecological ethos which emphasizes such subjunctives as “if we are to survive, then...” These

propositions lead to an internal and external practice resulting in coherency of social structure at all levels.

The above material is taken from the Appendices to The Structure of Reality. The main body of the text is an attempt to answer the “how” of the world; the answer is dependent upon the development and mappings of various kinds of elementary logical systems, and an analysis of the phenomenology of their inter-relationships. This material is too technical to be presented in a short paper.

The theory is also concerned with “the autonomy of discourse” – the idea that, as a theory develops, its specialized vocabulary begins to evolve its own structurations, while the original “subject matter”, the “content” of the theory recedes from the investigation. My own personal response to such recession is one of confusion, and, occasionally, revulsion. I both feel the need for the theoretical, and at times am frankly ashamed of this need.

Nevertheless, idealistically, I feel that the development of a theory of reality is necessary today. The theory serves, or can serve, both personally and politically. It can form the grounds for personal belief and political action; it can form the grounds for “making sense” of the world. I feel this question, that of situation, is one left unanswered for the most part, and one which is vitally important. For example, given any particular economic system, the question remains – what is the economic? Is it more than a propensity towards survival, scarcity commodities, etc? Could it, in fact, take its place among the other so-called psychoanalytical model altogether?

In short, I feel ambivalent. I became quickly personally disgusted with abstraction, and my own need for it, and I am also convinced

of a socio-political need for an abstracted coherent theory of reality. As I move from one pole to the other, the text moves from an axiomatic/logical formulation of the laws of the life-world to an embedding of these laws in a psycho-phenomenology. And at times, I find I stop writing altogether, becoming convinced of the uselessness of “my project”, which I nevertheless take up again, or through a process of thinking, develop more fully, or find fault with, or straighten out those mathematical inconsistencies which appear, or disappear, or leave on trailing; in any case, the text, the corework, i.e. The Structure of Reality, a book, or a block of pages, another entity in the world, has managed to remain.”

--Alan Sondheim

11/76

Notes by Kathy Acker:

“I felt like everything was crumbling, the streets I walked along were pieces of shit lying on top of crawling maggots. The buildings were the bones of starving Puerto Rican children.

I reached for his belt, I unbuckled it. I could hardly wait to touch what I had yearned for for so long.

His huge organ stood erect, and I gazed at it for several seconds before reaching out to touch, to fondle it.

I felt passion welling up inside me, I had never known this before. I was Almost afraid, but I was beyond

[4]

all caring. I wanted him. I wanted him. I wanted him inside me more than I've ever wanted anything.

In those few minutes, before I managed to lie down and pull his huge manly body on top of me, I thought I couldn't wait any longer. A second felt like eternity, and my mind was reeling with the emotion which was already exploding inside my head, my heart, my soft, warm, deepest insides between my legs.

I opened my legs as far as I could and felt him lean down upon me. He grabbed my breasts in his hands and squeezed them until I could feel jabs of pain shooting through me, or was it needles of ecstasy?

He thrust his organ into me, and at the same bit my hard erect nipples.

Before I knew what was happening, we were rolling together in rhythm da da da, gradually, faster and faster I could feel him thrusting thrusting deeper and deeper into me.

Suddenly I felt it. My body exploding. I was screaming. I didn't know what was happening.

I couldn't get my breath again, my whole body was being racked by spasms of ecstasy so great I thought I was in extreme agony and pain.

I couldn't stop. Once one spasm was over, I felt my body rising again, exploding inside me. My head would have blown off if it hadn't been connected to the rest of my body. All I could see were sparks of life, alternating with darkness.

I couldn't stop. Yet I could feel myself beginning to get tired. Still I couldn't control those incredible orgasms

which kept sending my body into the highest peaks of ecstasy.

Every time one orgasm was over, I felt as if I was falling into a bottomless black cave of horror, and I kept screaming – this time from fear.

And then, just before I thought I must be coming to the rock bottom, my body would begin to surge up again, and I felt everything exploding into pieces.

I was being scattered to all the ends of the earth.

Over and over and over I came. I couldn't control myself. I didn't know where I was or what was happening. I didn't even feel his huge organ inside me, sending me on and on into the peaks of ultimate emotion.

I wanted to stop. I couldn't breathe anymore, and I felt as if my body was just a blob of pain and passion all mixed into a fire ball.

When it was finally over, I passed out. I can't even remember what he felt, if he came with me or after me or if he came at all."

– Kathy Acker, 1976.

The New American Filmmakers Series (Exhibitions of Independent Film and Video) is assisted with funds from the Jerome Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The text reproduced here is a 4-page tract, archived at the Ohio State University Library, Thompson Special Collections Library, Alan Sondheim collection, SPEC RARE CMS 0164.

Transcription made from a digital copy.

Pages are unnumbered.

Numbers in the interior margin correspond to our pagination.

The document reproduced here is the flyer distributed for the projections programmed at the Whitney Museum from November 16-21, 1976. It featured two tapes by Alan Sondheim (made with Emily Cheng), *Red Art Brigade* and *Theses after Marx*, along with Acker's and Sondheim's "Untitled", their first tape (not yet known as the "Blue Tape").

The flyer is composed of excerpts from the Appendices of Alan Sondheim's *The Structure of Reality* (1977) and of a short text by Kathy Acker.

As Sondheim states, the *Structure of Reality* was completed in May 1976, but wasn't published until 1977, by the Williams College of Art (Williamstown, Massachusetts). It is the result of Sondheim's reflections dating back to the beginning of the 1970s. An earlier book, the *General Description of the World*, was published in 1974. Its discourse runs through Sondheim's monologues in the [Untitled Tape 1] and can be considered a first version of the "system" that Sondheim continues to elaborate in *Structure*.

Alan Sondheim described his project in the following words:

Since it seems to me that there is a limited time left in which I may freely attempt a systematic account of reality, I have taken an opportunity to write this text, which contains a condensation of my work to date. The text moves in slow oscillations from the presentation of a basic formalism to an embedding of this formalism in more general phenomenological, economic, and psychological matters. If an equation or statement is unclear upon first appearance, it will clarify itself through the stream of the text. I must apologize for the prosaic nature of much of the writing, but, as I have indicated, I am in a hurry to present it, so that I may continue my researches for a while longer.

4/76

This text attempts to answer the question "how is the world?". This question is the problem of the greatest generality that may be realistically considered. "Why is the world?" reduces either to a pseudo-question, or the search for grounds. The search may be psycho-analytically based; it may involve various techniques of self-referentiality. In any case, even the howness of the world is in need of grounding, since the motivating impulse of why is lurking in the background.

"Why is the world?" extends into "why is the world organized?" and

“why is the world organized this way?” Both of these questions may be answered in terms of a dialectical relationship between the specific qualities of consciousness and the dynamics of the universe as a whole. If we consider a theoretical plenitude of mutually disjoint universes with different dynamics, only a very small subset of them will possess life-forms and the development of conscious self-reflexivity. Our particular universe may be considered the occasion for the quality and existence of our intelligence. The nature of the bond between the cosmological and the biological (through the employment of the formalism) is one of the matters that The Structure of Reality seeks to explore. [*The Structure of Reality*, 1977, p. 2]

[...]

This text has been completed in May, 1976. It is itself intended to be a summarization of a great deal of theoretical work. Because of this, some things (such as taxonomy or the philosophy of biology) have been largely ignored. I may be contacted for further information.

I also want to add that this text has been completed under considerable mental duress; again, I feel a need to apologize for the obvious quickness of execution in certain sections. [*The Structure of Reality*, 1977, p. 80]

Variants:

In *The Structure of Reality – Text plus Appendices* published by Alan Sondheim in 1977 through the Williams College of Art (Williamstown, Massachusetts), one can find different versions of the texts reproduced above. Additionally, the texts appear in a different order.

As the first paragraph, “1. The Approach of a Stranger in the City”, contains a great number of variations, we produce it entirely below.

[*The Structure of Reality*, 1977, Appendices, p. 117:]

Prose I: Flight

[...] theory, or the foundations of logic. You felt, you would feel, the process [...] another bridge. Or a place to go. Proudly [...] that situation! the limit-point of the revolution! the impossible closeness [...]

Prose II: “It’s not our fault.”

[...] Our historical positions. [...]

There is something autonymous, that’s for sure. As if it were [...] copulate, masturbate, run, sit, [...] the actions rub against metal, or plastic [...] our actions are the same everywhere. The tanks [...] our actions are the same everywhere [...] maps of the circuits, none of us affect [...] sometimes were given – a gift – [...]

Prose III: Approach of a Stranger in the City

The problem reduces to this: A, finding him or herself opposite to, adjacent to, facing, within the personal proximity of, B, a person unknown, and B in relative opposition. All of the analyses focus here, imagined or real, located in, out-doors, in a subway, on a sidewalk. Perhaps one is impatient. Perhaps one has outlasted our time. Perhaps there is a sense of anger hovering... or futility... Certainly there is no warmth in the situation, no communication, guidelines. They remain bound: one, unable to move or speak, the other might scream, flee, defeat, deny: a form of humiliation. One fixed on the space in front, or to one side, or the other, or downwards at an indefinite distance, unvarying. The door closes while the room grows cold. Or others. But no kindred.

The problem reduces to this, faced on the way to work, or coming, or coming for a meal alone. Always one and another, always another and a one. The analyst returns to the apartment: one lives alone. There might be a comfort in this marginality. One is capable of description, the act of writing, about, sailing on a surface. The illumination of the page, its illumination.

Or is it destruction? Behind which the mind stops. Unable to remain here. Irruption, or not: now only the sound of the limit.

One hungers, moves out to the restaurant. Some are there. The distances between events are absolutes. In this culture, one stares fixedly at the food.

[*The Structure of Reality*, 1977, Appendices, *Theses after Marx*, p. 103:]

II[...] time; the Self moves within the barriers of a Newtonian present. The Self [...] VI [...] is valuable. In terms of effect (through mediatization), the disruption itself need not occur at all. [...] IX The highest point of these theses leads to the analysis of society, not in terms of isolated individuals, but in terms [...] Strata-topologies are not hierarchical structures, but networks in which there need not be a highest or lowest level. This cybernetics is essentially an-ethical; it contains no prescriptions as to the ultimate forms or goals [...] and external socialist practice resulting [...]

Notes:

592 WHITNEY MUSEUM We end in 1976. Acker turned 29 in April. She published *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula* in 1975 with The Vanishing Rotating Triangle Press, as the author named "The Black Tarantula." Soon she'll become Kathy Acker. In the texts leading up to the production of the [*Untitled Tape 1*] that's being screened here, Kathy Acker as author digs into childhood memories and tries on voices, including the voice of her father, which she gives to Alan Sondheim. That father, as the main identity for masculinity, is no longer central in this 1976 text. Instead of Father we have "him": I wanted him. He exists mainly through her desire. In her 1991 interview with Sylvère Lotringer, Acker talks about dads and feminism:

Feminists made me realize then why one would want to decentralize a father, take the father and tear him apart. I had some theory behind it. It also made me realize what my relation to these old authoritarian male poets was. I must have been very influenced by them, but certainly in a perverse way. Charles Olson said that when you write what you have to do is find your own voice, but it all seemed very big, almost God-like, and I found this very confusing. I couldn't find my own voice, I didn't know what my own voice was. And I'm sure that's where I started to write in different voices and started to deal with schizophrenia. This was behind it, was in a way a fight against the fathers, because they were very much my fathers. It fits nicely.¹

We've watched Acker first try to build her dad, giving him a voice that she takes on or that she gives out, one of the layered voices that seeps into memory and alters sense of self. We watch her work to decentralize this voice. Father isn't just Alan, or her actual dad: if you're an afab person writing then father is also most of what you've been given to read. Like here: Burroughs, Olson. The technology of accumulative experiment is a feminist technology. We've been watching Acker develop it.

Returning to Acker's 1988 interview with Ellen Friedman, Friedman describes her work as "overtly" feminist, and Acker doesn't deny this but does interestingly situate herself:

By the time I first heard of feminism, I was in college. I never really thought about feminism until I got older and realized that the society was deeply sexist. I don't consciously write as a feminist, although there are a few places in *Don Quixote* where I was dealing with Andrea Dworkin. There is an attack on Andrea Dworkin in *Don Quixote*, not her personally (in fact I saw her on a TV show and quite admired how she stood up for feminism), but on her dualistic argument that men are responsible for all the evil in the world... She blames the act of penetration on sexual intercourse. I find that not only mad but dangerous... But as a rule, I haven't thought, "I am a woman, a feminist, and I'm going to appropriate a male text." What happens is that I frame my work that way after I write it.²

Andrea Dworkin was already then, and has increasingly become the poster woman of sex-negative radical feminism. Although recent compilations of Dworkin's texts, edited notably by Amy Scholder who also edited posthumous Acker, do provide us with nuance and compassion for Dworkin's writing. Acker's citation of Dworkin here signifies that she's interested in the structural aspects of patriarchal domination, but not how Dworkin thinks that domination plays out through sex. In reaction, Acker positions her

1. Kathy Acker and Sylvère Lotringer, "Devoured by Myths," in *Hannibal Lecter: My Father*, Pasadena CA: Semiotext(e), 1991, p. 18.

2. Ellen G. Friedman, "A Conversation with Kathy Acker," *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 9.3, 1989.

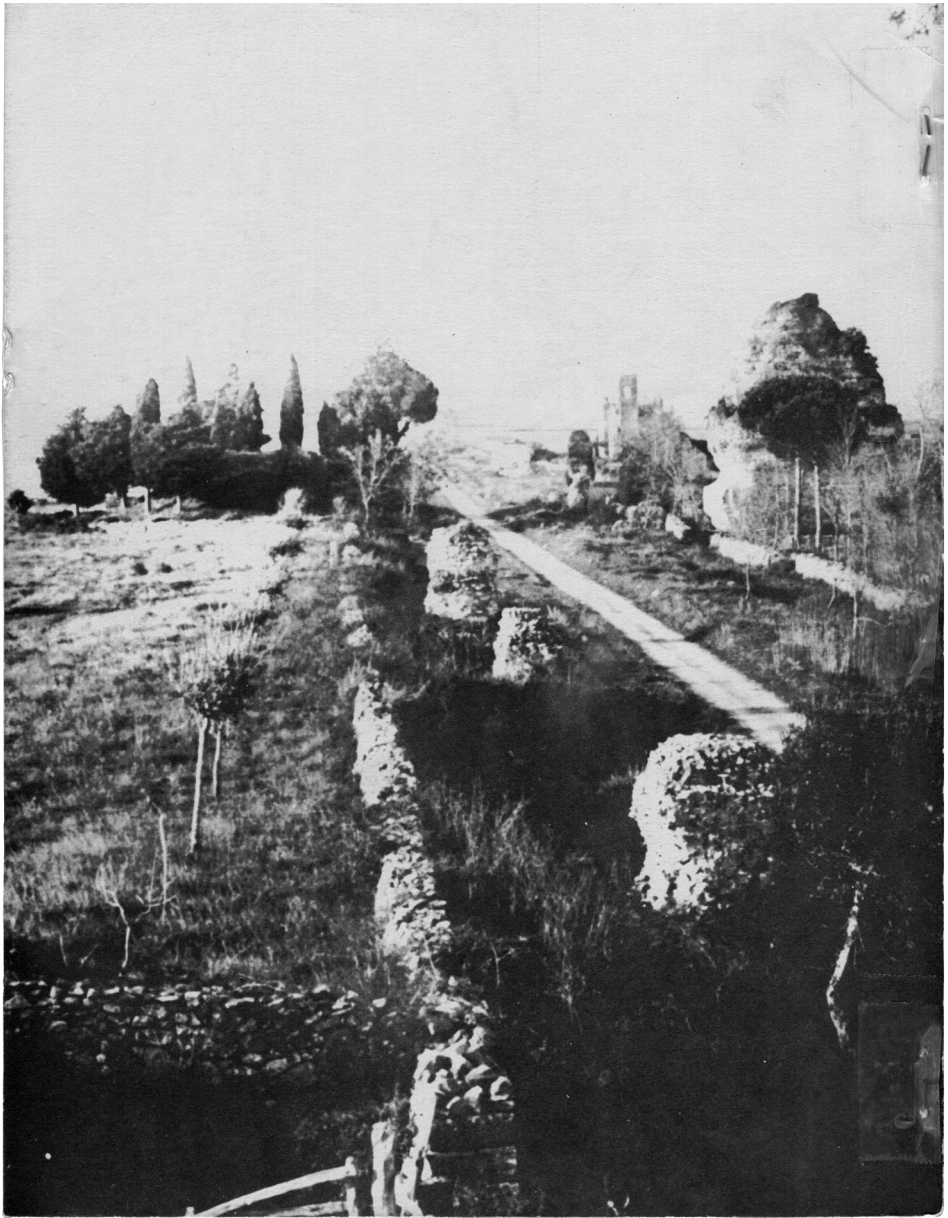
work in sex-positive and pro-penetrative feminism, in which the actual sex acts are not the problem, but the way in which these acts are imagined, practiced, and described are. The later essays collected in *Bodies of Work*, especially Acker's essay on Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (called "Seeing Gender") show that Acker was rapidly moving toward a proclaimed, developed feminism, very different from the "I don't really think too much about it" response she gives Friedman in 1988.

When we leave Acker, here at the Whitney in 1976, she's on her way to developing a feminist language that gives sex to girls and all of their friends. That lets them be totally passive or power bottoms or good with a strap-on or all of the above. In the decentralized space left after the father, Acker builds the cunt. Acker's cunt isn't her actual genitalia, it's a metabolic device based in her experience, history, the trial-and-error that we've been following here. Dodie Bellamy writes in an essay to/about Acker:

Shit is the oxygen of your literary atmosphere. The cunt is the mouth that breathes it in. Sex is a nightmare of effects: narrative discontinuity, abrupt changes in position and lighting, unexplained losses, confused durations — a writing with the primitivism of a stag film, that "seems to want to remind viewers of their position in the theater or at the smoker, on the edges of a frame that cannot be fully 'penetrated,' witnessing a spectacle that still has aspects of what can be called a (genital) show rather than identifying with actions of a temporally sequenced (genital) event." (Williams p. 67-69). Our expectations fester, bleed, dissolve. You're so good at being bad in your books that some fools assume you're a dominatrix — straight men who need to be set even straighter. "I'm not a top hon," you drone matter-of-factly. "That's not what I'm into." As the Haitians told Maya Deren, "He who wears the shoe knows best where it pinches."¹

Kathy Acker as author comes to being through trial and error, noting from the beginning that the problem is in the shit that surrounds us (patriarchy, racist capitalism, colonialism). She invents protocols to convert that shit into something else. The diary as literary form, cut-up poems that scatter experience across the page as she plays with the breath-stop, the explosion of her desire on the inside of someone else's existing work, subjective translation, memory protocols, attempts to merge physical touch with writing that's always about sensation and relation. The power bottom as cunt-y motivation reverses whatever history says the trivial is, and the girl fills with a million voices that merge and collectively coat meaning. I felt as if my body was just a blob of pain and passion all mixed into a fire ball. [CF]

1. Dodie Bellamy, in *Moving Borders*, op. cit., p. 670.



Cover and back cover of Alan Sondheim, *The Structure of Reality*, printed by the Williams College Department of Art, Williamstown (Massachusetts), 1977. Black and white photograph; digital reproduction courtesy of Alan Sondheim.



THE STRUCTURE OF REALITY

TEXT PLUS APPENDICES

ALAN SONDHEIM

1977

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Williamstown, Massachusetts

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by Alan Sondheim

ALAN SONDHEIM —
ABOUT THE “BLUE TAPE” (2002)¹

Message-ID: <Pine.NEB.4.44.0209202244220.12185-100000@panix1.panix.com> **From:** Alan Sondheim <?> **To:** Cyb <cybermind@listserv.aol.com>, “WRYTING-L: Writing and Theory across Disciplines” <WRYTING-L@LISTSERV.UTORONTO.CA> **Subject:** The Blue Tape **Date:** Fri, 20 Sep 2002 22:44:40 -0400 (EDT)

The Blue Tape

I was still married to Beth and heard Kathy read and Kathy came and Beth moved in with Ed and Bernadette had moved out or moved out then and Beth and I had been together four and a half years more or less. Kathy and I began writing each other; she placed me in the position of her father; I thought she was my soulmate. Ed had a copy of her diary; I pasted the letters in it. Later I gave it to Tom who passed it on to Chris. I don't know where it is now. Kathy came one night when Beth left and the next day and next few days were terrible; we made the tapes - there were more than one - in the midst of the terror. Emily, who had been my student at R.I.S.D., filmed the materials on an EIAJ black-and-white Sony deck, I think 3600. They were filmed at my apartment, which Ed's brother Tom, I think, had found us, on 16h or 17th street; perhaps it was his.

I had been working in video and writing; Kathy had been writing; I suggested we do a tape to pay for her coming out from the coast. We got a bit of advance booking. Everything fell apart between us. She had worked in Times Square; I suggested we explore sexuality on the tapes and she agreed. I'd been working on and off in a messy narrative style, which I still do. There was no editing beyond starting and stopping the camera. At least one of the other tapes was an inverse of the one we showed.

We pushed things as far as we could. I felt needy. I hated myself.

I remember Kathy being suicidal, accidentally locked out of the flat when Emily and I took a break; she'd wanted to be alone. Neither of us were in great shape. I forget whether we made the tapes all that day or over a couple of days. I forget the sequence.

We showed the tapes at St. Mark's and there was dead silence afterward. Vito was there. I think it was then that Jackson was there as well. Kathy said You've had your fun, children, now go home. or something to that effect. People were upset. Jackson said it was a very brave thing you did. We showed the tape at Yale and everyone laughed. We showed the tape at R.I.S.D. and everyone cried. At R.I.S.D. we went to an opening and someone came on to me who had been a student and I wasn't used to that and she came to the flat on 16th or 17th street and we had a short affair, but that led to another story. I showed the tape at San Diego, or maybe it was Cal Arts, or maybe both. I don't remember.

1. From the Alan Sondheim Mail Archive, online.

I'd never been able to watch the tape; it was too painful. It still is. After the California showing, I said I didn't want to show it again, and Kathy thought that was ok. (We agreed only to show the tape with mutual consent.) I didn't for years, until it was revived and shown in various places and I'd moved on and so had she.

I was teaching at Hartford Art School and asked David to take it in for a grant application; he ran 'the dirty parts' for his students and swore them to secrecy. One of the students told me, crying hysterically, at the end of the year.

Kathy thought I was crazy and I thought she was crazy. Sometimes I'd hear a hello from her later on. We did, back at that time, a complex electronic piece for WBAI, again about love, control, etc., the usual subjects. It went well but I don't think it was broadcast, but then I don't know.

I don't know where "The Blue Tape" title came from; I don't think we'd given it/them titles, but I'm not sure.

What else? I'm glad the tape's out there and being seen again. There was a recent article on it on the net; I thought most of it was wrong or slanted but that's to be expected. Every time it comes up, those days come back to me.

And those days are long gone. Bernadette didn't speak to me again. I was with her sister for a while. Vito and I stopped speaking. Around 1977 I moved out of New York and around 1990 I moved back. A lot has happened since then.

Alan Sondheim.

I met Kathy Acker when she and Alan Sondheim were in the midst of a very intense relationship. I was one of Alan's students, when he was a guest artist in my freshman 3-D class at Rhode Island School Design. The following year, I spent studying painting in New York City, and Alan had come down to live in NYC as well. We pal-ed around in the village, going to book stores, having coffee and visiting artists, me tagging along with Alan. Alan and Kathy lived on the two coasts so frequent communication was difficult and not very satisfactory. This was a time before the Internet and "long distance" phone calls were still over 20 cents a minute. So they made many lengthy audio tapes for each other to listen to. Resorting to tapes seemed natural to Kathy and Alan, who were not only gifted with words but very natural with the expression of stream of consciousness.

When they met in New York to do this video, it seemed their boundaries, defenses and borders were dissolving as their relationship progressed. In hindsight, I see that this was one of the dominant themes of the Blue Tape: the merging of identities, then pulling away to claim separateness, to define themselves and their relationship through words and the interaction and use of their bodies. There was also a kind of push and pull or give and take between vulnerability and power; the ability as well as the dare of allowing oneself to be totally open and vulnerable to the other but at the same time meeting the other with a very powerful presence or force, through words- sometimes in the form of poetry as well as touch. Kathy and Alan were each very distinct people so a lot of the tape was also defining who they were individually and in context with the other.

I was asked to videotape one or two scenes. Having some, but limited experience making Super 8 movies in high school, I think I was asked more as a trusted observer in this very intimate project. The blow job scene was the definitely the most tricky one to shoot. We used an inverted cereal bowl on top of a small step ladder as a tripod. Here in this episode, Alan was the vulnerable one, naked, lying down with Kathy working her way up with her tongue from Alan's toes. But Alan had the microphone, which gave him a certain power and was taking full charge discussing a theory of the world, as I remember, though getting slightly desperate to maintain composure and intellectual prowess. In this delicate scene, I felt a little protective of Alan's vulnerability and so when the camera arrived with Kathy on Alan's privates, I zoomed in and simultaneously went out focus. Kathy with all her erotic experience worked hard to undermine that male logocentric mind giving him sensations that would eventually unravel the logic and become a chaotic crescendo, leaving Alan in a babbling moaning mess. Kathy in a sense won that match, asserting the physical over the mental. My memory of Kathy was her self confidence and

1. This text was emailed by Emily Cheng to the publisher on September 10, 2018, in response to the publisher's questions about her participation in the making of the tape.

utter lack of self consciousness with her body and emotions. It was a rawness I had not encountered before and haven't since. There were also painful aspects in watching their interactions, of pushing personal and emotional boundaries.

Being part of the making of the video, seemed perfectly natural to me, as I am a very open person, to all kinds of ideas. It was a time of a lot of experimentation in art, performance and video with very few parameters of what was not acceptable. Art was under the political radar, which gave us a lot of freedom and a lot of work was edgy.

There was a second tape of me, but I'm not sure that Alan was referring to that one, as it did not involve Kathy. I don't know of a second tape with Kathy and Alan.

JUSTIN GAJOUX —
14TH STREET STUDIO AND FUN CITY (2019)

On a stretch of 14th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues, in a basement next to a funeral parlor, was located the studio where Bob Wolfe (aka “Four X” and “Lawrence T. Cole”) shot his sex loops.



Larry Revene,
shooting a loop
in Bob Wolfe's
14th St. Studio
(courtesy of The
Rialto Report).

Bob Wolfe – “rumor had it that his father was an abortionist and his mother a strip queen”¹ – was described by those who frequented him as a “Village bohemian photographer”.² In 1971, he was probably in his late 30s. A “friendly, hippy type” with long salt-and-pepper black hair in a ponytail who “would often talk about his theories on eroticism and pornography”.³ Though “jovial” he “had a paranoid streak as well”;⁴ and “was shameless in his lusts and obsessions”.⁵ Some would consider him “a creep”.⁶ In her 1971 *Section from DIARY* Kathy Acker treats him with contempt.

I even had a conversation with Bob the shit today in which we were trying to be kind of nice to each other he's kept me on so long he's part of a group of hippy entrepreneurs they have enough money to be in the middle class anti-establishment they have real long hair I'm a hippy I tell him not to fire me [*cf. supra*, p. 76]

the goddamn sex show the boss actually the sub-boss Bob growing more evil Kali tells me that as she was dancing then pretending to use

1. Marc Stevens, quoted in *The Rialto Report*, “Ghosts of New York Adult Film: Bob Wolfe's 14th Studio”, posted on August 17, 2014, <www.therialtoreport.com/2014/08/17/ghosts-of-new-york-adult-film-bob-wolfes-14th-st-studio/> [accessed on April 3, 2019].

2. Anthony Bianco, quoted in *ibid.*

3. Jamie Gillis, quoted in *ibid.*

4. Larry Revene, quoted in *ibid.*

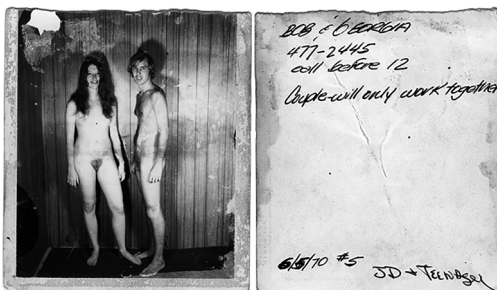
5. Marc Stevens, quoted in *ibid.*

6. Harry Reems, quoted in *ibid.*

a dildo Bob was in the back saying come on come on more get that cunt up there come on get it into it sweating trembling Josie said Bob told her to cut out the talking and get on with the fuck [...] (Bob and the other shit horrors) [cf. *supra*, p. 39]

Every two weeks Bob Wolfe ran an ad in the *Village Voice*. People would call in and set up appointments; then, they would come down the steps and knock on the gate “because we always kept the gate closed.”¹ The place was smelly, rarely cleaned; the only piece of furniture “was a bed covered with a stiff sheet that was stained so badly it looked like it almost had a pattern.”²

Unknown couple,
audition Polaroid,
14th St. studio,
1970 (courtesy
of *The Rialto*
Report).



Bob Wolfe and his assistant Larry Revene would take Polaroids of the people who came for casting, “talk with them a little bit, see what they were about. It was mostly couples and single girls.”³ At the end, they would write their personal contact details on the back of the Polaroid, and Wolfe would call if he wanted the candidate for a loop.

The film loops were aimed to be shown in the peep machines that Martin (“Marty”) J. Hodas (aka King of the Peeps) was the first to install in Times Square bookstores around 1965⁴. It had an immediate and tremendous success: it was cheap, only \$25 to make the machine work, and the concept was new. Each machine would screen one film over and over again, a quarter would buy 1 minute and a half for the client, who would need to keep paying to go through the 7min that each film lasted.⁵ Soon all of the booksellers asked to have one.⁶ After buying films from other producers, Hodas started (around

1. Larry Revene, quoted in *he Rialto Report*, “Ghosts of New York Adult Film: Bob Wolfe’s 14th Studio”, posted on August 17, 2014, <www.therialtoreport.com/2014/08/17/ghosts-of-new-york-adult-film-bob-wolfes-14th-st-studio/> [accessed on April 3, 2019].

2. Marc Stevens, quoted in *ibid*.

3. Larry Revene, quoted in *ibid*.

4. The date “1965” is given by Larry Revene in his interview for *The Rialto Report*, “Larry Revene: Loops and organized crime”, podcast posted on May 12, 2013, <www.therialtoreport.com/2013/05/12/podcast-010-larry-revene-loops-and-organized-crime-2/>, [accessed on April 3, 2019].

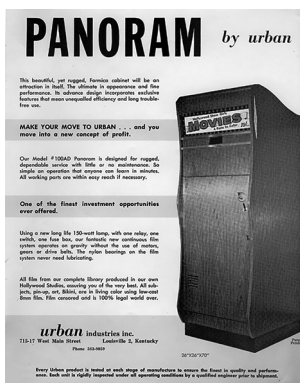
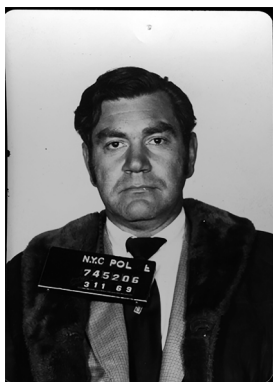
5. Cf. Larry Revene’s interview to *The Rialto Report*, *ibid*.

6. Considering the explosion of the demand, after 15 machines had firstly been purchased in Los Angeles, Hodas ordered new ones from Urban Industries Inc. (Kentucky) that had discontinued the production. By the late 60s there were about 400 peep shows in and around

1969 or 1970) producing sex movies through a start-up company called Dynamite Films, with which Wolfe was associated. Marty Hodas, though he never directed an adult film or acted in one, thus played an important role in creating the sex film industry.¹

Hodas, around 1970-1971, introduced live peep shows where the clients would look through what looked like a camera, but in fact opened into a room where strippers were performing; he also owned a live S&M theater with new shows starting every hour.² He gave Bob Wolfe the job of manager for a live sex show, Fun City, on Times Square. Kathy Acker and Leonard Neufeld worked here, along with others like future porn star Jamie Gillis. Those live shows were softcore (meaning the performers weren't supposed to have "real" intercourse – meaning no penetration), and remained on the limit of legality: a buzzer system was installed to alert the staff upstairs when policemen were coming.³ Kathy and Leonard's arrest for public lewdness while performing at Fun City testifies to this situation.

Martin Hodas in Nov. 1969 and an ad for a coin-operated movie machine from Urban Industries Inc. – the company that supplied him (courtesy of The Rialto Report).



One main source of profit for Hodas remained the films shot by Bob Wolfe at his 14th Street basement. It was completely illegal and clandestine. The loops were shot in 16mm positive reversal films, which were then optically reduced to 8mm negatives and copied by Paul Rothenberg to supplement the peep show machines. Rothenberg ran Arrow Lab on spring Street (Manhattan), and was linked to criminal Roy DeMeo which

the intersection of 8th Avenue and 42nd Street. (Cf. Martin J. Hodas, interview for *The Rialto Report*, "Marty Hodas: King of the Peeps", podcast posted on June 29, 2014, <www.therialtoreport.com/2014/06/29/marty-hodas-king-of-the-peeps-podcast-38/>, [accessed on April 3, 2019]).

1. *The Rialto Report*, "Marty Hodas: King of the Peeps", *ibid*.
2. *The Rialto Report*, "Marty Hodas: King of the Peeps", interview with Martin J. Hodas, podcast posted on the 29th June 2014, cf. *supra*.
3. *The Rialto Report*, "Jamie Gillis: New York Beginnings", interview with Jamie Gillis, podcast posted on November 17, 2013, <www.therialtoreport.com/2013/11/17/jamie-gillis-new-york-beginnings-podcast-25/> [accessed on April 3, 2019].

eventually murdered him. The loops were about 7 minutes long,¹ shot in black and white (or color, depending on who you ask) with a Bolex camera. They remained silent for most of the early 1970s. It would take an hour to shoot one. They mostly didn't have any plot at all and rapidly turned from soft to hardcore.² Sam Menning (famous for his still photographs) and Bob Wolfe were the two main loop-shooters; in 1971, Larry Revene became Wolfe's assistant, and edited the films with him, in the same studio. Performers who would later be famous such as Linda Lovelace, Harry Reems, Jamie Gillis and Darby Lloyd Rains, all started in Wolfe's loops.

"We'd normally shoot six films a day in this tiny room [...] Very few out of the six films, maybe only one of them, would use a bed and so the rest were improvised around other props, like a desk or a sofa."³ In his debut, Jamie Gillis – who started in January 1971 – remembered receiving 30 dollars for a loop. Yet, on average a male performer would receive around \$50-75 and a female performer between \$75-125 for a shooting; each film loop would produce around \$450 of income. Larry Revene estimates that a series of six loops (a day's work) would, after costs, bring in around \$1200 of profit to Bob Wolfe. The latter would sell not only to Hodas, but also to Eddy Michcan (running Wholesale Books on Union Square, one of the main loop distributors in the country).⁴

Very few men could perform more than one film a day, while women would do two or three in a row. Performers could be hippies, average young people, coming from all sorts of backgrounds – "there were so many normal people or just regular people in porn".⁵ Because they were totally inexperienced (the job itself was completely new), the directors were often uncertain of the results. Martin Hodas himself, after comparing the profits produced by each loop in the peep machines, would define what type of sex to shoot (his conclusion was that lesbian sex and big breasts were definitely the most lucrative features in a film).⁶

During the summer of 1973, Paul Rothenberg was shot on Long Island, and Bob Wolfe packed up the studio and drove to the west coast.

1. Seven minutes is the number given by Larry Revene (cf. *supra*, his interview to *The Rialto Report*) but other testimonies estimate the time between 10-15min for each film. As Revene was the assistant director we prefer his version.

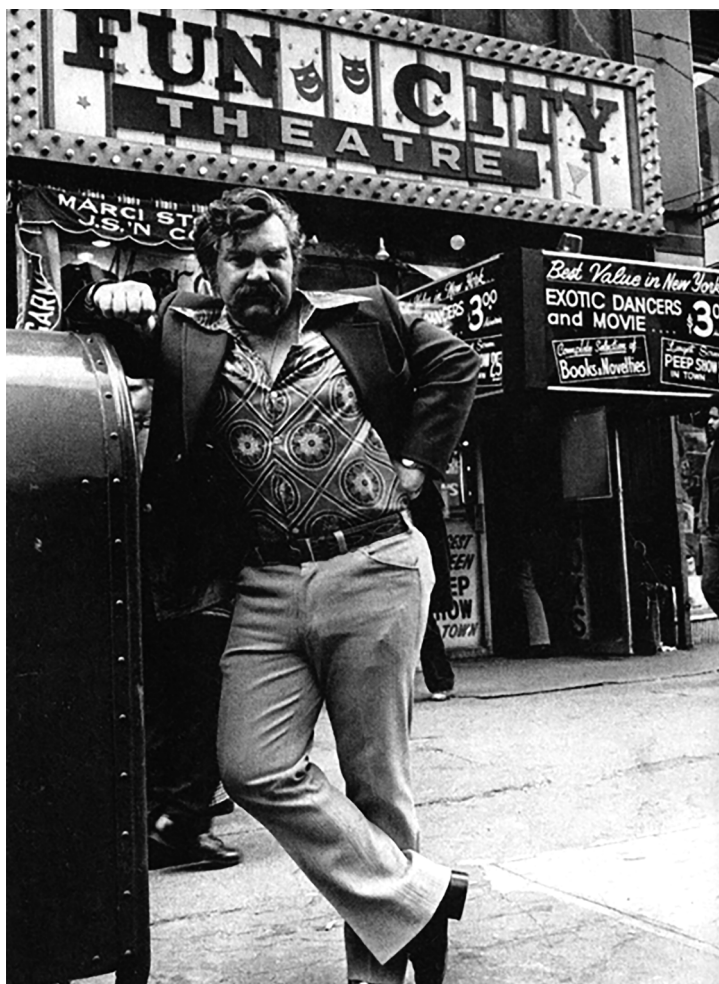
2. *The Rialto Report*, podcasts of interviews with Larry Revene, with Jamie Gillis and with Martin J. Hodas (cf. *supra*).

3. Larry Revene, quoted in *The Rialto Report*, "Ghosts of New York Adult Film: Bob Wolfe's 14th Studio", cf. *supra*.

4. *The Rialto Report*, interview with Larry Revene, cf. *supra*.

5. *The Rialto Report*, interview with Jamie Gillis, cf. *supra*.

6. *The Rialto Report*, interview with Martin J. Hodas, cf. *supra*. — This isn't just a corny detail, Hodas' testimony (which seemed the result of a kind of statistical inquiry) actually reflects something of the sexual phantasms shared by men and women in New York at the time. Kathy herself reflects them through her texts.



Martin J. Hodas in front of his Fun City theatre, ca. 1971 (courtesy of The Rialto Report).

KATHY ACKER AND SEX WORK IN THE SECTION FROM *DIARY* (2019)

Sunday now is the only reality

— Section from *Diary*, p. 44.

According to Leonard Neufeld, he and Kathy Acker started sex work by acting in “maybe a dozen” (“or a few more”) hard-core porn films directed by Bob Wolfe. All the films were made at the 14th Street studio, “except for the few films we shot for other producers, like the one shot in our apartment” (cf. *supra*, photographs, p. 98, 91). After making films with Wolfe, Wolfe introduced them to Martin J. Hodas, who asked them to do a Sunday act in Fun City’s live sex show. They eventually stopped after getting busted. They wrote “little skits that we then acted out on a stage in front of an audience of around 50 people”, “pretty tame soft-core porn”. According to Neufeld, in a conversation with Chris Kraus, Kathy seemed to be comfortable with sex work; she “wasn’t scared, because it was a safe situation. If she liked the other person, she enjoyed it. Often I took her, even if we were not working as a couple.”¹ Recently he added, doubtfully, that Kathy maybe hated some of those jobs, and some she didn’t. Talking about himself, he wrote: “can’t say I enjoyed it — too self conscious. But the context was always OK, as were relations with others”.²

So far, along with Peter Gordon’s (cf. *supra*, p. 329), this is the only first-hand testimony we have of Kathy Acker’s experiences in the sex work industry, besides what she wrote and said herself.³ The facts seem to be: she acted in a dozen “hard-core” porn films in NYC between the summer of 1970 and January 1971; from January to March 1971 she worked at the Fun City live sex show; she then worked as stripper in San Diego, and at least once in a massage parlor, sometime between Sept. 1972 and June 1973.⁴ She rarely mentions her (or one of her characters) acting in a porn video.⁵ When she talks about her sex worker past, it is mostly as a stripper. Judging by the allusions through her writing, the job at Fun City was definitely the experience that most shaped her conception of sex work. As she suggested, there was a big difference between NYC and San Diego, between live acts and stripping: There’s a big difference between doing simulated sex acts on a stage (and even that was interesting) and working as a stripper. Working

1. Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 55; interview with Leonard Neufeld, in 2000.

2. All previous quotations from Leonard Neufeld, email to the editor, April 14, 2019.

3. Chris Kraus also quotes Mel Freilicher’s text, where he brings up the time Acker was stripping in San Diego (*After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 77). — Acker talks about it in her interview with Barry Alpert, at Mitali Restaurant (NYC), for *Only Paper Today*, March 30, 1976; pub. in Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Melville House, 2018, p. 19-24.

4. For this particular point, cf. Kraus, p. 77.

5. In her third letter to Alan Sondheim, ca. March 1-2, 1974, she writes: “worked doing dirty movies” (cf. *supra*, p. 450); cf. also interview with Lisa Palac for *On our backs*, May-June, 1991, pub. in Kathy Acker, *The last Interview...*, op. cit., p. 125.

as a stripper is a very high form if you want to take it like that... I mean it's gorgeous and a real art unto itself.¹ In this paper we will exclusively consider the NYC period.

In her analysis of the relation between sex work and writing, Chris Kraus underlines the gradual and changing mythification process those events went through in Acker's texts – starting as “picaresque tales about a young woman's economic survival on old-time New York during the era of sexual liberation” before becoming “a young woman's descent into an endless vortex of exploitation and poverty”.² Kraus's point of view is retrospective (she takes into account all of Acker's fiction production), general, and separates the historical objective from the subjective fantasy. Trying not to contradict pro-porn feminism, and relying on a subjective impression that in the time of “sexual liberation” sexuality could be easier, more straightforward and natural, Kraus somehow overlooks Acker's revolt against the social-economic system sustaining the industry of sex, as well as the personal struggle to define her own sexuality that Acker was going through at that time in her life. The “reality” thus dialectically alluded to in Kraus's notion of “mythification” is only a simulacrum, as it isn't formed out of the complex relation between, at least, contextual and subjective agencies, and it doesn't question the literary nature of her main source (the *Section from DIARY*). The present text intends to analyze Acker's experience of sex work through a precise description of the logic that relates it to her act of writing, her sexuality, her fantasies and socio-economic position: at least as these are performed in the *Section from DIARY*.

We will follow roughly two hermeneutic approaches. As the *Section from DIARY* is the main source we know of regarding Acker's sex work in 1971, we will use it to accentuate the testimonial aspect of the material, extracting information as if the form were somehow transparent. At the same time, we treat the *DIARY* as we believe it deserves to be read, as a literary work composed from diarylike materials which works significantly to organize several layers of signs to create a complex discourse irreducible to the author's body-life.

One main reason that Kathy Acker and Leonard Neufeld started sex work, acting in sex tapes then in a live sex show, was economic. Acker couldn't depend on her parents' help, and as she wanted free time to write and be **uncommitted alone**³ sex work was an opportunity to make enough money in short work sessions.⁴ Neufeld, who had more economic pressure on him because of divorce proceedings and child support,⁵ had to keep a

1. Interview with Barry Alpert, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

2. “Her years in New York with Len Neufeld would be retold as a fable; a young woman's descent into an endless vortex of exploitation and poverty. [...] Over the years, as she experienced new forms of grief, the tone of these stories and their effect on the narrator would shift. Her picaresque tales about a young woman's economic survival on old-time New York during the era of sexual liberation would be recast as dirges.” (Kraus, *After Kathy Acker*, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 55-56).

3. Cf. *supra*, *Section from DIARY*, p. 65.

4. Cf. *supra*, p. 88, regarding the salaries paid for those jobs.

5. Cf. *supra*, *Section from DIARY*, p. 42: “he has to pay \$100. a month child support \$20. a month divorce lawyer”.

steady 8h/day job at an editorial agency. Acker, although she had PID when she arrived in New York, probably did more sex-tapes than him, thus supporting the two of them; later, both Acker and Neufeld getting sick of screwing fag hustlers, he eventually listened to Bob Wolfe's suggestion and pushed them to start doing the Sunday live sex show.¹ In any case, they kept saying it's only for a few weeks², it even seems – according to this statement made in the middle of February 1971 – they had planned to work only four or five months at Fun City: I'm getting more and more uptight about doing them [the shows] I count them three and half more months 16 more days 96 more shows unless they have to do emergency show³.

But the labor conditions as she experienced them didn't encourage Acker to continue working for Bob Wolfe and Hodas. She continually considered quitting; whether it be through getting a full course scholarship at F.I.T.,⁴ going back to artists' modelling⁵ or through agencies⁶. She felt she needed to find a good job [...] like a hole in [her] head. By Acker's standards, the desire to work a steady job is indeed suicidal. But though she hated the alienation that goes along with steady jobs, closely associated in her eyes with what she names "robot" life/lobotomization,⁷ nothing in the sex work job *itself* could persuade her to give up the option entirely. Money and personal interests continued to outweigh whatever doubts she had. I think now that I sold out to work in the show it might have been better to get a shitty 8-hour-a-day robot specialty who knows I'd probably still do the same since money has the same fucking attraction given this society⁸. Getting out or staying in thus appears as a real and contradictory obsession through the Section from DIARY: get desperate about getting a job⁹ [...] I don't want to leave want to get out¹⁰ [...] mention a 9 to 5 job I'd rather prostitute".

Paternalism, constant masculine sexual pressure, deplorable work conditions, hierarchical violence: these are some of the aspects that strongly affected and revolted Acker. The risks of police raids – a permanent threat for performers whose real-seeming sex performances were positioned on the fringe of legality – put the workers in a situation of vulnerability and fear that could easily turn the 30min show into a stressful experience: scared every minute the cops were going to bust and having to decide between the

1. "I supported him and me when I was fucking sick doing dirty movies then the live show he pushed us into that? getting sick of screwing fag hustlers two bad scenes with photographers it looked like a good bargain" (Cf. supra, Section from DIARY, p. 61).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

7. Cf. editorial note, p. 93.

8. Cf. supra, Section from DIARY, p. 40.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

\$20. per show and the cops¹. On the other hand, the possibility of shortening a performance, even for a minute, was fiercely forbidden, clients and bosses united to defend their acquired right for consumption and profit: they now time our show god forbid we stop a minute earlier signs all over the projection room saying that Bob is pissed off² [...] there's a purple clock on stage god forbid Jesus a show should run a minute short the customers complain they look at their watches shits business fucks in napalm jocks³. If time was to be exactly counted and respected by the workers, it wasn't valued in any way that would respect them. Acker mentions: after-midnight shows bosses don't want to pay extra, 14 hour day at work and no union for workers, projectionists who get less than 1/3 of the union rate per hour for their job, ⁴ an old black sick janitor who receives \$1 per hour and is threatened with dismissal for letting a drunk client enter⁵. Nor was the space cared for, it was always kept strikingly filthy, ⁶ part of a wider strategy conducted by the sex industry to integrate the "dirty" in the circuits of profit, to turn puritan bourgeois representations of non-reproductive sexuality into an asset.⁷

As the *Section from DIARY* extensively expresses, the pressure for productivity was particularly heavy on female performers. Bob Wolfe, from the backstage, would urge them to make more and more real what was supposed to be only suggested, asking – all sweating and trembling – Kali for example to actually use the dildo or Josie to cut out the talking and get on with the fuck⁸. Women's bodies as the main attraction of the display were made direct targets of males' demands; and their bodies were made even more vulnerable by the hierarchical-patriarchal-economic relations maintained at all costs inside the industry. Several situations are exposed: a projectionist was constantly bugging Kathy, a drunk hit Josie on her ass during her show⁹, Lenny gives Kathy a bunch of spreads during the shows bites me pulls my nipple up with his teeth and she continues: I don't give a damn I just want to get the thirty minutes over with

1. *Section from DIARY*, p. 41.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

4. Cf. supra, *ibid.*, p. 39.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

6. "they pissed everywhere else in that joint, really filthy black and white tile floor." (*I Dreamt I Became a Nymphomaniac! :Imagining*, "Peter's story", self-published as a six installments serial novel in 1974, feat. in *Portrait of an Eye, Three Novels*, Grove Press, 1998, p. 140).

7. Strategy alluded to by Michel Foucault: "If it was truly necessary to make room for illegitimate sexualities, it was reasoned, let them take their infernal mischief elsewhere: to a place where they could be reintegrated, if not in the circuits of production, at least in those of profit. The brothel and the mental hospital would be those places of tolerance: the prostitute, the client, and the pimp, together with the psychiatrist and his hysteric [...] seem to have surreptitiously transferred the pleasures that are unspeakable into the order of things that are counted." (*The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: "An Introduction", trans. by Robert Hurley, Pantheon Books, New York, 1978, p. 4).

8. *Section from DIARY*, p. 39.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

don't even care what I do please the shits sex hungry mongrels yap yap at my cunt like Fan's act'.

In these circumstances, the main feeling – besides exhaustion and not expressing pleasure – that Acker experienced is hatred. Directed at Bob Wolfe (fat turd²), the rest of the masculine staff (shit horrors³), the clients (sex crazy lunatics⁴), and widening to include all men whose patriarchal attitudes and constant sexual harassment overwhelmed Acker and others not only at work but outside of it too: intense hatred for men actually for anyone overbearing on me pushing me into a high-powered situation the typical business meeting since I work on 42nd street this happens for me mainly with males⁵ [...] [Hannah] says when she looks for free-lance drawing jobs she doesn't know if the guy wants her to draw fuck what the connection between the possible two desires are she'd rather she didn't have a cunt I tell her I shaved my head⁶. This discomfort, hate and repulsion seemed to have amplified a previously existing feeling of hate [for her] body sex⁷, and alienation from it. The opposite of what Lenny says: O everything is beautiful money is evil just look at your body and you'll see how beautiful you are – money in the sense of work and in this case commercialized sex performances shapes the female assigned body-mind in a specific way. Effectively, Acker's answer to him isn't so simple: I look I see me I don't know if it's beautiful dull it doesn't at that point seem like me⁸. In 1971 she doesn't seem to experience her body as a familiar comfortable space. Instead, she talks about it as a space refused to her for identification, kept foreign and somewhat unexplored. This was probably partly (of course, the situation is always complex) because of imposed patterns of femininity, epitomized by the heterosexual consumerist eyes she felt all over at that time: I'm hideous with my short hair and draggy breasts⁹ [...] I feel dead now two more shows to go my back's broken out from the filthy bedcover on stage I'm allergic to this way of life mine? the last time I got on stage for the first ten minutes I felt I wasn't me I was going through mechanical personality changes and actions I got scared I might flip¹⁰. Throughout her later texts, the idea that sex work leaves a mark on the body is recurrent: the women look down on me; they sense I once worked in a whorehouse¹¹.

Eventually, she started to feel outraged at the entire socio-economic structure in which sex work was inscribed. The fusion of what could have appeared as incompatible characteristics, like being hippy and entrepreneurs and having enough money to be in

1. Section from *DIARY*, p. 66.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

10. Cf. *supra*, *ibid.*, p. 82-83.

11. *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*, 1st installment (June 1973), feat. in *Portrait of an Eye, Three Novels*, Grove Press, 1998, p. 14.

the middle-class anti-establishment¹, was realized by the people working in the sex industry in a way that seemed to signal the inauguration of a new form of liberalism. Sex was no longer convincingly the place of resistance against conservative values and disciplinary repression, nor was it the space of the natural or the original, of union and equality, as was still the dominant fantasy in the 60s. Sex was now a weapon of social terror for power-voracious white hetero or bisexual middle-class men,² not only because they integrated its non-reproductive forms into the open market, but also because sex allowed an elaboration and enactment of normative masculinities and feminities for the purpose of consumption, capitalist pleasure and profitability — with eyes tightly closed to the gender, race, and social violence that this mainstream investment of sex implied.

I don't want anything to do with sex I've gotten completely Puritan I love Lenny who else I love will love that's something else I'm no know sex and aren't going to be touched like I were America the middle class punks shit-asses li-ber-als have gone sex nuts they're becoming gay until they find something else tricks for kicks can you imagine it fucking some rich power-hungry creep because you want to not because you're broke need junk etc. Miss J.P. Morgan says I do it all the time you're such a girl Johnny Carson all-American eunuch white jacket white pleated pants three face lifts wrinkled dick fucking seems to be a new way of throwing more bombs all promoted by 42nd street I make sure to tell everyone I meet for the first time I don't fuck it's gotten so you meet someone by sucking them off³

Acker's critical position was very precisely aimed, striking against both conservatives and liberals, foreseeing a new moment in sexual politics. It saw beyond the screen of the late 1960s and early 1970s's "permissive society"⁴ which followed the "sexual revolution", where new ground in free speech and sexual expression was broken. It identified "the disciplining of sexuality through unquestioned notions of normalcy"⁵ and the social violence involved in the new liberal stance. The strong libertarian conclusions of the 1970 report of the Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, conceived mainly by liberal scholars, identified no direct negative effects of pornography upon consumers

1. Cf. *supra*, Section from *DIARY*, p. 76. — Cf. *supra*, "14th Street studio and Fun City" for a description of Bob Wolfe from men that worked with/for him.

2. In 1970 the expansive porn market was driven largely by white, middle-class men; it was also estimated that 75 % of American males were exposed to pornography before the age of twenty-one (cf. Whitney Strub, *Perversion for profit. The politics of pornography and the Rise of the New Right*, Columbia University Press, 2010, p. 155).

3. Cf. *supra*, Section from *DIARY*, p. 63. — Acker will later amplify this reflexion in *New York City in 1979*, cf. *supra*, p. 97.

4. The expression was coined by members of the burgeoning New Right, as well as by conservative biologist Boris Sokoloff as title for his 1971 book (cf. W. Strub, *Perversion for profit. The politics of pornography and the Rise of the New Right*, Columbia University Press, 2010, p. 146).

5. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

and called for massive sex education, holding that “sex is normal, healthy, good”.¹ Yet it completely overlooked the indirect structural domination and violence that the sex industry was helping to consolidate. Acker somehow exploded the concept of “consenting adults”, the idea at the heart of the 1970 report’s policy recommendations, and fundamental to liberal legislative tradition. She drew attention to workers’ conditions and economic struggle, as well as to how attributed-gender could become an innate justification of sexual domination. As Acker understood, gender assignment provokes semiotic changes and alters experiences of desire and coercion.

Acker could ironically consider becoming a “Puritan” again and draw back from free sex to love-sex only, in a way to resist imposed over-sexualization of all heterosexual relations. This sudden ironic valorization of Victorian values aptly reacts to the often overlooked loss women experienced with the new standard of the capitalist-produced “liberated woman”. If before, a woman exchanged rare frigid sex and unpaid housework against economic security, now sex became a woman’s duty; and so did her orgasm and pleasure. The sexual liberation thus revealed itself as a new capitalist strategy to create a non-frigid femininity more apt to consolidate the nuclear family through more efficient – unpaid – reproduction of men’s work.² Women had to offer all sexual services freely, without expectation of any return, or else they would be rebuked as “not yet liberated”. Nevertheless, Acker knows the solution for herself isn’t to draw back into monogamy – if you just have to love the person you’re balling you’re pretty repressed we’ve all got to be spontaneous³ –, she couldn’t retain her love for only one partner without experiencing the same dissociation she observed in her parents and “in the whole society”, it would be the end the destruction. As she is already going through sexual repression and violence at work – it’s a drag to fuck your ass out I’m already screwing my sex up denying my sex and my feelings about my sex in this job⁴ – she feels the last place she should accept repression is when she fucks, dissociating love and desire from sex, becoming a robot, mechanical and submitting to an inverted sex fanaticism I’m so scared I’ll have to sleep with someone I don’t (yet) want to being forced to eat someone’s ass⁵. The idea of exploring sex out of love and desire⁶ – reconciling sex, pleasure, femininity and self-control – as rudimentary as it can seem, in fact is invested with

1. W. Strub, *Perversion for profit. The politics of pornography and the Rise of the New Right*, Columbia University Press, 2010, p. 156.

2. Cf. Silvia Federici, “Origines et développement du travail sexuel aux États-Unis et en Grande-Bretagne” (1975), trad. E. Dobenesque, first published in S. Federici, *Le capitalisme patriarcal*, La fabrique éditions, 2019, p. 169.

3. Cf. *supra*, Section from *DIARY*, p. 63.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

6. “I fuck only the men I’m madly in love with (for that time)” (*The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*, op. cit., p. 61).

deep meaning in Acker's logic, paradoxically¹ indicating where to look for the reasons she chose sex work and stuck with it.

whatever's literally true the reality I have to show my cunt I have to stay alive I could get too crazy to know when to kill myself², she affirms in the *Section from DIARY*. But why is sex work such a (vital) necessity in spite of what she describes as its "reality" and when risks of alienation are so high? In the first place it's clear she saw in the job an opportunity to maintain some of her class privileges without submitting to the lifestyle her class background promoted. The most important of these privileges being leisure: I've spent the last four years of my life deciding the way in which I get money by refusing to do anything that would not let me over-sleep³. The precarious situation she found herself in in New York, deprived of her parents' and Bob Acker's support since she left him, would end if she just accepted a regular "good job". The calculation that she made instead probably wasn't very different from the one writer Valerie Solanas exposes in her 1967 *S.C.U.M. Manifesto*: many females would, even assuming complete economic equality between the sexes, prefer living with males or peddling their asses on the street, thus having most of their time for themselves, to spending many hours of their days doing boring, stultifying, non-creative work for somebody else, functioning as less than animals, as machines, or, at best – if able to get a "good" job – co-managing the shitpile.⁴ With a 103\$/month rent, an average of 480\$/month salary and expenses probably shared half half⁵ with Neufeld, she could get along keeping six days off to write, while maintaining a relative economic independence. Moreover, if on the one hand it was hard for her to risk completely losing her comfort and security, money-wise, because of what her social origins had made her used to,⁶ on the other, it is maybe thanks to the education and carefree youth it provided for her that she was able to find in sex work a way to betray these social origins as well as the shitpile it supports. She saw an aesthetic-political value in the whole experience. As an artist she could have a life to put down⁷ on paper.

1. In the *Section from DIARY* the author's statements and impressions aren't as one-sided as we present them in this article. She deliberately uses a contradictory style, where an affirmation is very often followed by another that weakens if not opposes it. Moreover, the fluidity she attempted to reach through abandoning all punctuation and ignoring necessary syntactic conventions reinforces the impression that no statement can be taken separately, but only as a moment of a reflexive process through writing. Still, for more clarity, we chose to chop the text into pieces, organize these, and rebuild over the scale of this article the logic she seems to follow: living-writing, each paragraph enacting its correlating hypothetical moment.

2. Cf. *supra*, *Section from DIARY*, p. 40.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

4. *S.C.U.M. Manifesto*, Valerie Solanas, The Olympia Press, 1971, p. 9-10.

5. Cf. *supra*, *Section from DIARY*, p. 51.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 54: "shouldn't spend the money shouldn't spend money it's bad you've gotta save up money or you might get in trouble there's too much that you have to protect yourself against and be able to save yourself from I want stuff even more".

7. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

These class determinations shouldn't obliterate but rather contextualize the political disruptive signification of Acker's decision regarding labor. Choosing to provide for herself, she refused the married housewife life she had had with Bob Acker, and that she was induced, as a Jewish-origin upper-class woman, to follow. By opting for sex work as soon as she arrived in New York, she affirmed that she wasn't going to accept the patriarchal bargain of maintaining "respectability" at the cost of dependence and submission towards men. Moreover, she ran counter to capitalist strategies that had been developing since the mid-19th century: strategies that deepened, over and over, the separation of the housewife from the whore in order to definitively convince women that their place was inside, reproducing devotedly, for free, men's working capacity.¹

Yet, the relation between Acker and money isn't simply defined by past and structural determinations, nor by her ambitions. Several clues in the text give the impression that she lived in an almost near-constant state of anxiety provoked by personal issues, her relationship with Leonard, and because of the job itself. She self-treated this anxiety through compulsive spending — as if her determination to lead a life of intensity and immediacy meant living a life that cyclically burned through its own means: I maniacally spend everything presents to keep us me going I don't think Lenny needs them I never save a cent I then sit and brood we have no money imagine what else I want a mania about glittering objects lately².

Sex work was especially valuable for the concretization of her artistic career. As she acknowledged, the shows in themselves could very well pass for a kind of "performance" in the eyes of established artists: getting a job through the show getting into something like the Warhol group³; in terms of her own work it wasn't a completely impersonal demonstration, as she often played out personal themes in her Fun City skits.⁴ But the time for writing was still the the best advantage.

Through the *DIARY*, at that time, she was trying to overcome the conceptual duality between inside experiencing mechanism and outside event with the intent of developing a more impersonal and total rendering of the process by which experience is enacted. She did this by: being able to put down on the spot how she lived an event, avoiding syntactical and stylistic constraints to give a sense of greater directness in the final version, and awareness of trivialities and feelings. This use of the diary-form as a mode not only of introspection, recording, and unleached expression, but also as phenomenological experimentation, flatly mirroring the self as a semiotic process beyond transcendent object and subject — because I constantly change lie forget the lie was a lie invent on top of that —, is definitely a special contribution Acker brought to occidental writing before 1971. Her literary engagement in the *DIARY* is not to be minimized. Although, along with other avant-garde artists of that time, she acknowledged literature was at a critical moment because of a general poverty of experience. She denounced the substitute of academic

1. Cf. Silvia Federici, "L'invention de la ménagère" (2016), trad. E. Dobenesque, in *Le capitalisme patriarcal*, La fabrique éditions, 2019, p. 138.

2. Cf. *supra*, Section from *DIARY*, p. 43.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

4. Cf. p. 93 for the Santa Claus Skit.

discourse for experience; and although she acknowledged that some parts of the diary were probably only interesting to her, she also felt that her experiment hinted at a promising meaning that she shouldn't spoil with literary and poetic over-consciousness. She wanted to get beyond known habits and aesthetic criteria, to find a different language that she could use as an exploratory medium:

we've lost track of everything we face the blank page and have no life to put down no one knows why we write because for centuries we've been lost a maze of academic shits all words but those concerning money no longer have value what tracks we have to find repeat follow back into the Old days' [...] I want a record of the way in which I remember and distort or refine experience through time though that's my private shit since my life can't be this fascinating to anyone else² [...] something pleases me about putting trivial incidents down as they happen one by one I don't know what I don't care if I remember properly in fact I remember none of my pre-school childhood don't think that I give a damn Paul's sucking on his nipple [...] there's something important about putting this down that might come I'm not being direct enough even in this stuff worry when I type about commas spaces prettying up the shit I get more hung up³

The diary is even more groundbreaking considering that it is used as an efficient tool of resistance against patriarchal-economic domination. Total (impersonal) reappropriation of experience meant letting semiotic changes happen to as much of phenomenon as possible, letting circumstances bring forward repressed meanings and overthrow the preeminence of others.⁴ The formal device of the *DIARY* as Acker invents it permits her to substantially and structurally question the femaleness and sexual domination her body sex⁵ is assigned to identify with and is subjected to.

To understand how this formal device works, it is useful to look to the religious-ritualistic analogy that Acker uses periodically in 1971.⁶ Through daily repetition of impressions, unraveling of fantasies, giving equal credit to what she feels and what she knows,⁷ Acker manages to sabotage the foundations of objectivity upon which identity is grounded. Writing – as a means to translate, repeat thoughts and to imprint these thoughts on the self until they become real – hacks reality, contaminates the experience process, using the extreme pervasiveness of words. To multiply this effect, and to reach other fantasies-languages, Acker used altered body-mind states, turning often to masturbation and oversleeping to propel the writing. Those experiments reveal discourses, desires, images, associations normally out of reach. More radically, she attempted to reduce the

1. Cf. supra, Section from *DIARY*, p. 40.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 59-60.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 40, 42, 59.

7. "I trust neither my ability to know nor what I think I know" (Kathy Acker, "Preface" *Bodies of Work: Essays, Serpent's Tail*, London, 1997, p. viii).

separation between body-mind states, making the passage from one to another swifter, in order to contradict the normative identification of “consciousness” with rational thinking, disembodied logic, non-influenced judgement, awakened mind etc.: masturbating makes clear what I want to do sexually’ [...] I can sleep 16 hours a day after a while the distinction between sleeping and waking consciousness disappeared a semi-controllable continuum in which animals and men resembled one another². Yet importantly, this fluidity doesn’t equal organic continuity. The form of her *DIARY* reveals that consciousness is not so much a stream, as early modernists often described it, as a succession of gasps. In the same way, her textual work resists the temptation of wholeness which, itself, implies values of property and identity. The diary is thus the way for Acker to live through and in [personal] fantasies³, effectively making thoughts and feelings question and alter the representation of her self and the performance of this self.

One of the key fantasies interwoven in the process of the diary is lesbian desire, and the expression of this desire is central to understand the link between writing and sex work.

I keep being hung up about this lesbian business because I won’t say to myself the obvious I want to be in love with a girl I keep putting in sex it’s the desire to be equal not top or bottom and fully recognized as equal and other I’ve got a cock and you’ve got a cock of course no other desire could be as powerful I don’t know if I could so easily prostitute that sex as I do now⁴

The desire for what she calls “this lesbian business” is associated with the fantasy of a horizontal, fair and de-hierarchized sexuality. The words she uses to describe it seem to respond to the lack of respect and equal treatment on the part of men that she continually expresses during this period. Acker often points to how heterosexual love relationships throw her into a submissive, fragile, in need-of-affection female role: whenever he tries to baby me or treat me like a female I get uptight⁵ [...] I feel like I should be a female⁶ [...] I keep asking what’s the matter to Lenny nothing why aren’t you talking to me I get guilty god forbid a suburban nagging wife haha⁷. Being “treated as female” makes her feel vulnerable and dependent, which enhances what Acker describes, through writing, as a deep feeling of insecurity and fear of being rejected coming from childhood: this is probably a childhood fantasy it comes up all the time with Lenny I ask him to love me meaning I want him to take care of me I don’t know what that statement means more feeling means I have no idea why it recurs which it does

1. Cf. supra, Section from *DIARY*, p. 56.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

often so that I get angry at Lenny because he won't listen to me and I feel like I'm not showing what I want every time he tries to help me do something even take over my decisions I am completely pissed¹. To appropriate masculine-connoted signs was thus also a strategy she used to escape from being limited to assigned gender: in spite or due to all the slap on the back I'm a man attitudes² [...] I shave all the hair off my head as Lenny says use to hope but not very well pretend I was very tough and male so that I could escape from my parents the 57th street prison denying all my desire³. The contradiction between her desire for love and her desire for control, because of the reigning patriarchal semiotics for which the female can get love only in exchange for submission, is intensely felt by Kathy Acker. Her attraction and empathy for other women as well as her interest in the lesbian community (cf. *Diary Warmcatfur*) politically meant a wish to accomplish not a "sexual liberation", but a liberation of her sexuality from its assigned forms, from its exploitation and the risks it implied, and therefore to discover her pleasures according to new criteria. It also meant the creation of new bonds between women and a communication independent from masculine presence and discourse, thus inverting the tendency in capitalist society of isolating women from each other as housewives. This process of change and questioning led her to inquire into her real feelings about her attributed femininity, so she can figure out what she wants from it: I'm not a woman I try to follow that thought to what extent imaginary? I've turned myself inside out if I was a woman delicate pretty mainly going to be taken care of, wasn't. so that wasn't what I want⁴. Lesbian practice seems to be the answer she fantasizes against heteronormative femininity and maybe even against biological femaleness, but the maintenance and enactment of her lesbian desire is often depicted as a struggle, with steps forward and backward⁵: do I want to screw another woman meaning I'm a female? Lenny says I've got a cunt I do⁶. Eventually this process could

1. Cf. supra, Section from *DIARY*, p. 41.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

5. Another point worth noting in the diary is Acker's interest for "animal-human desire" (*ibid.*, p. 44) through the description of her interactions with her cats. As the "lesbian business" the fantasy questions subjectivity's structure and sexual-biological norms: "Paul and I can really make it [...] kiss between his legs down to his balls I don't think they've fallen yet I tried kissing his balls but he doesn't dig that for now [...] I wonder what I have about them it's not just wanting a kid I hate kids [...] I don't even like people easily deeply? blah I've got something big about these cats [...] they let go completely arch their backs and stomachs so they can rub against us more easily our bodies are fetishes cure them of their diseases they hate other people with some few exceptions scare the way we do and hide I can't open myself to Lenny the way Paul spreads his legs for me it takes more disintegration destruction of my mistrust" (*ibid.*, p. 70). It recurs later: "I take my sex with animals" (*The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*, 2nd installment, *op. cit.*, p. 26). — Experimentations between species was also appropriated by the sex industry at that time: in 1969, at the same studio Acker did sex tapes and also under Bob Wolfe direction, was shot *Dogorama*, a twenty minutes film with Linda Susan Boreman (*aka* Linda Lovelace) and a Rhodesian Ridgeback.

6. Cf. supra, Section from *DIARY*, p. 42.

lead her to create, “instead of preserving the masculine / feminine opposition, [...] a possibility of non hierarchical articulation of [sexes’] difference in language”¹.

Sex work can now take a more determined meaning if we give attention to the way Acker relates it to her lesbian desire and her fantasies in general, casting the performance of sex work as another means, along with writing, to permanently and practically gain control over body, mind and words, releasing them from the grasp of capitalist-patriarchal alienation. Indeed, exploring her lesbian desire is a main reason she gives, at one point, for staying in the sex show: I keep having this suicide desire like I can’t get along I’m a butch or a fem? I’m the one who has fantasies about homosexuals which is why I’m getting caught up in the 7th avenue shit². We could read this as meaning that she either found agency in the economic necessity of performing at Fun City, using the sex work to overcome her shyness and psychological barriers preventing her from realizing this desire, or that her doubts about her gender and sexuality, as well as her attraction to women, helped to open the way to sex work as a space where play with gender roles is possible. Play made even more attractive because based on the required pay-in of unwitting male clients who, as consumers, represent and ask for the continuation of the patriarchal-capitalist system. In any case, the 70s sex work that Acker describes did demand from performers (especially women) a capacity for impersonation, a fluidity in their gender roles, and fantasy. But where it was problematic for Acker was that the play is not, at least on the surface, for the benefit of sex workers, instead responding to the range of potential client desire. Thus, for Acker, sex work becomes a paradox, both promising fantasy and exploration, and capitalizing on these capacities to reproduce domination. I find I can talk only to those people who are loose in the ways they live to the extent of perversity a strange addiction to 42nd street³ [...] you have to become a criminal or a pervert [...] I admire criminals in my head knowing they’re shits businessmen motherfuckers like everyone else⁴. This “perversion” she identifies in relation to sex work is exemplary of Acker’s writing position, which always assumes both a romanticized imaginary and a “hard truth” about the “reality” at play.⁵ Later, she would talk about this love-hate relationship with patriarchal society in general as one of the double-binds that women are in, on one hand their sexuality was defined economically and yet their sexuality was the area of freedom for them, was their area of survival⁶. Writing in the zones of those double-binds has been central in Acker’s works since 1971, she spoke the languages of pleasure, desire, alienation, conscientiousness,

1. Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, “Questions”, éd. Minuit (Paris), 1977, p. 157 (our translation).

2. Cf. *supra*, Section from *DIARY*, p. 52.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

5. “I reread the first part of this xeroxing too fucking romantic I lead the most unromantic life in the world a new generation of Puritan dope addict moralists” (*ibid.*, p. 79).

6. Conversation of Acker with Dean Kuipers, at Gramercy Park Hotel Bar (NYC), July 2, 1988; pub. in Kathy Acker, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Melville House, 2018, p. 40.

hate, and revolt, thus creating a complex approach to subjective experience when reality's objectivity, immediacy, meaning, and political structure are at issue.

The *Section from DIARY* thus importantly adds to existing literary depictions of sex work, in that writing here is not the way out of sex work – the way back to normative life – but rather the way in and perhaps more importantly the way through the dominant context, with its prescribed gender roles. Moreover, instead of falling back on the humanist concepts of integrity and dignity of the female body, she orients her critiques against the social-economic system that determined the merchandising of sex at that moment, thus lifting the *DIARY* well above personal memories and to a disruptive performance of language, intended to sabotage a reality structured according to power.

I've really gotten disconnected from the world I don't know what are sexual cues behaviorally what each cue if I knew what it was is a cue for I've sailed to a foreign land [...] I'm too far gone I do probably go worse if I realized all the jungle horror New York is Harriet says I can't cope with this world I can put down all the stupid things which happen to me I've got a grip on something I can't go flying into dreams' [...] Sunday now is the only reality².

Writing and sex work, together, gradually altered her semiotic relations with things, people, and the environment. She felt estranged from reality, from usual communication. What she discovers isn't a promised land, but a process of becoming which drives her toward a space where conscience, spontaneity and control are possible, a place in which I can do exactly at every moment even passively what I please³. With the *DIARY* Acker takes care of herself in spite of systemic and material domination inside and outside. In this sense, the text is a therapeutic, ritual, protective, and intimate space. But it is also public, as she – instead of closing herself into self-conviction and self-sufficiency – impersonates through speeches and fantasies various assigned positions and imposed roles that are such figures of authority and submission. This brings us to consider another of Acker's literary innovations: the political subject she creates is a locutor whose sentences intrinsically posit themselves in the map of power relations; no sentence assumes itself to be genuine, all bear quotation marks and thus question the origins of discourses and their relations – be as paranoid schizophrenic as possible. all sentences suspect. [...] writing is the use of information without the source of the information⁴.

1. Cf. supra, *Section from DIARY*, p. 81.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

4. *The Burning Bombing of America: The Destruction of the U.S.*, spring 1972, Grove Press, 2002, p. 158-159.

PORNO-GRAPHING ACTIONS OF THE “BLUE TAPE” (2019)¹

I first contacted Alan Sondheim in early 2014; I had watched the Blue Tape² in 2012 (at the Interiority Complex exhibition curated by Jamie Stevens at Cubbit gallery in London), and had instinctually identified it as porno-graphing. At that time I was already two years into my practice-led PhD, attempting to use the term, “porno-graphing actions”, to group together a set of creative practices that have shared aesthetic, personal and psychological dynamics – for example artists’ shared interest in low-tech or diaristic aesthetics and pornographic vocabularies, and self-submission into “dirty” positions. The Blue Tape carries some of the most visually and contextually identifiable characteristics of porno-graphing actions such as seeming dryness, distance and detachment in regards to sex; also, processes of artists self-submitting, or self-objectifying, to how they think others may potentially perceive them. That is, self-objectifying into roles and subjectivities which they themselves consider that if seen from the outside may potentially be perceived as “dirty”. The aim of this creative manoeuvre is to critique the very patterns of thought that would attribute “dirtiness” to a subjectivity to begin with.

I didn’t, couldn’t really, fully grasp or convincingly describe porno-graphing until I started engaging in close, careful, durational dialogues with Alan Sondheim as well as the other artists whose work I was researching, Leigh Ledare and Lo Liddell. Through my encounters with Sondheim, Ledare and Liddell, I became aware of how my own “lacking” positions, such as self-doubt, destabilisation and non-sovereignty, function methodologically and I therefore understood how these lacking positions also operate in porno-graphing methodologies. In this way, my take on the Blue Tape concerns how Acker and Sondheim claim spaces of their own non-sovereignty, as subjects destabilised in themselves, embracing and submitting to their anxieties, contradictions, disappointments and frustrations, and the porno-graphing actions they construct through these processes.

Particular and particularly significant to my relationship with Alan Sondheim is our shared resistance to answers and resolution, which, along with our shared neurosis about exposure, is an enduring feature of our continued contact. We both are mobilised by a drive to expose our selves through our works, sometimes using sex and sexuality, while at the same time being overtly destabilised after having done so, or even having just thought of doing so. These conversations and their conditions and parameters have informed my understanding of what I call non-sovereignty – that state of subjectivity where one is not

1. Elements of this text first appear in these two publications: Pinaka, AM 2019, “Porno-graphing: ‘dirtiness’ and self-objectification” in Thomas Waugh & Brandon Arroyo (eds) *I Confess!: Constructing the Sexual Self in the Internet Age* (McGill Queen’s University Press, Montreal); Pinaka, AM 2017, *Porno-graphing: What do “dirty” sexual subjectivities do to art?*, Onomatopoe, Eindhoven.

2. The title *Blue Tape* refers to the same video that is referred to as “[Untitled Tape 1]” in the other chapters of this book. I use the title *Blue Tape* because this is how I got to know the work and because I used this title throughout my research.

able to explain one's self to one's self – a crucial notion to porno-graphing, which I will use for my analysis of the Blue Tape.

My porno-graphing claims about the Blue Tape concern the significance of how Acker and Sondheim use their sexual and artistic subjectivities to create irresolution and incoherence in regards to the meaning and value of art and subjectivity. I attempt to perform a reading of the porno-graphing actions of this piece that ultimately acknowledges both artists' agency, with the aim to show how this work complicates and destabilises (or intensifies) the relationship between the artist, the art-work and the art-viewer.

The Blue Tape was made in the 1970's but was rarely shown until the 2010s. Agreeing to screen the piece only if both of them were present, Acker and Sondheim initially screened it in roughly five university spaces in North America. Then, "falling away" from each other, they decided to not show it again.¹ Alan Sondheim also recalls that when, close to the time of the first screenings of the Blue Tape, art critic Edit Deak and artist and art critic Walter Robinson were interviewed about the video, both said that "it wasn't art".² The case is not that Acker and Sondheim felt their work destabilising due to its sexual content per se, but more due to how its making drove them both to an emotional and mental edge and to exhaustion, as well as to the end of their relationship.³ And it is precisely this working from the "edge", working from destabilised positions, that invites that the work be met with ambivalence and doubt, as "not art", by viewers as well as by the artists themselves.

To approach what this means and how it works I use theoretical grammars of queer theory, especially queer negativity, which can broadly be thought of as referring to "libidinal energies given over to destabilisation, unbecoming, and unravelling – as 'self-shattering,' a shadowy sexual impulse that most people would rather deny or sublimate..."⁴ I draw from Jack Halberstam's work on shadow feminism, radical passivity, and being un-subjects⁵ to consider how meaning is linked to sexual enjoyment and satisfaction; to examine how the porno-graphing actions in this video employ sex so as to disorganise meaning and knowing, I turn to the theory work Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman developed in Sex, or the Unbearable.⁶ I investigate how the two artists use self-submission and self-objectification to embrace structures they want to critique (such as a line of thought that may call one "dirty" or pathological) as a means of critiquing them. I critically look at how Acker and Sondheim use their own non-sovereign positions to invite (or trick) the viewer into giving up their own sovereignty of looking and perceiving.

A second tape exists, filmed immediately after the Blue Tape by Acker and Sondheim. This second tape is a structural parody of the first one, and features Acker and Sondheim

1. Sondheim, A 2014, pers. comm., 23 February.

2. Sondheim, A 2016, pers. comm., 17 December.

3. Sondheim, A 2014, pers. comm., 23 February.

4. Halberstam, J 2010, "The Artist is Object", Bully Bloggers Blog, blog post, 5 April. Available from: "bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2010/04/05/the-artist-is-object-%E2%80%93-marina-abramovic-at-moma/" [13 December 2014].

5. Halberstam, J 2010.

6. Berlant, L & Edelman, L 2014, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, Duke University Press, Durham.

swapping roles and positions. For instance, in the first tape there is a sequence where Sondheim's fingers are on Acker's vulva as he tries to get her off, but cannot. As I argue below, this scene, more than displaying an inability or a mismatch, shows a stubborn resistance, an attention to the part of the encounter that doesn't work, that operates separately from narratives of satisfaction and resolution. In the second tape Acker's finger is on Sondheim's penis but instead of appearing as she would actually try to pleasure him, she just touches him sporadically as he shouts theatrically "oh no!" What thus becomes evident in the second tape is their critical distance in relation to the truth-claims made in the first tape. Or, put differently, the second tape marks the methodological nature of the artists' use of autobiography in the first one – that they use their relationship and their bodies and selves as material rather than as truths to be documented. I didn't encounter the second tape until well after I finished my PhD research, and as my account is already lengthy I will limit the remit of this chapter to the Blue Tape.

Do you want to play my father now?

The premise of porno-graphing methodologies – artists recognising a sexual dynamic as potential art material, and acting upon it to make art – is evident in the genesis of the Blue Tape. Kathy Acker and Alan Sondheim met at a dinner party in New York, and realised that they shared interests and ideas. Once Acker returned to California, where she was living with her boyfriend, she and Sondheim wrote letters to each other. Not long after their first meeting, Sondheim gathered funds and invited Acker to make a piece with him suggesting that they can "explore sexuality on tapes".¹ The video was made in a domestic space – the New York apartment where Alan Sondheim had lived with his ex-wife. Therefore, Acker and Sondheim, after mutually recognising a certain sexual dynamic between them, decided to act on it with the aim of making art from it, to "explore it on tape" instead of enjoying it privately. Furthermore, their on-tape exploration is premised on approaching and acting on their sexual dynamic critically, instead of treating and representing it as a subject of sexual passion, satisfaction or liberation.

The Blue Tape, which Chris Kraus describes as a "twenty-four-hour sex-and-truth marathon"² is composed of eight sequences. In each sequence, Acker and Sondheim engage in sexual and reflective actions and exercises. Aesthetically the video is straightforward: each sequence is uncut and camera movement is infrequent. Contextual complexity manifests through the ways the artists address and implicate each other and the viewer in their sexual and artistic exploration: for example, by looking at the camera while talking to each other in the third-person. When sexual acts take place, the camera (operated by Emily Cheng) zooms close, underlining to the viewer that creative choices are taking place and that Acker and Sondheim directly use and negotiate their sexual dynamic and their subjectivities as art-material. Similarly, in the opening sequence of the

1. Kraus, C 2000, "Sex, Truths, and Videotape", *FEED Magazine*, Available from: "cubittartists.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/CKraus_BTape.pdf" [23 March 2014].

2. Kraus, C 2000.

Blue Tape, they introduce themselves and the themes of power and authority, as subjects of their dynamic and collaboration, as well as describing how they met. Their connection is framed by the absence of Acker's father (he left her mother when she was three months pregnant), Acker's subjectivity as an abandoned child and how, through their written correspondence, Acker situated Sondheim in the place of her absent father. Sitting down and looking towards the camera, Acker narrates their first meeting. She pauses her narration to mention that she has never met her father and that she has recently started thinking and feeling about him. She continues saying that she sent some writing about her father to Sondheim, who then starts reading a passage ("Breaking Through Memories Into Desire"), whilst Acker keeps looking at the camera:

AS: I know who Alan is, Alan is my father [...] I don't want that, not now,
I don't want parents, I don't want anything but Alan's hands on me. I
want to know what's happening [...] I keep remembering.

Subsequently, the two artists enter into a dialogue whilst the camera continues to frame Acker's sitting torso:

KA: Do you want to play my father now?

AS: I think I feel I can play your father now.

KA: You do want?

AS: I do want because it is the only safe position.

Kraus argues that the dialogue between the two artists is motivated by competition: Acker challenges Sondheim and uses such challenges for the sake of her own artistic development, while Sondheim's approach is critical regarding how "personal" Acker is.¹ Whilst I don't necessarily agree that Sondheim criticises Acker or that she competes with him for the purposes of her career in the ways that Kraus suggests, her comment certainly illustrates that the two artists' ways of relating with each other in this video can be perceived as exploitative (towards each other) which, in turn, reveals the porno-graphing nature of their methodologies.

Through porno-graphing methodologies, negative attention is drawn to the conflicts, contradictions, asymmetries, antagonisms and confusions within a sexual dynamic, to approach, sometimes slowly and sometimes rapidly, what Berlant and Edelman call the "problems of radical incoherence and relational out-of-synchness that threateningly traverse the subject and the world". Artists' embrace of how others may see them is another way of voicing such "relational out-of-synchness". To self-objectify into how they think others may perceive them, artists present themselves as destabilised subjects; as "incomplete, contradictory and out of control".² For example, further on in his dialogue with Acker in this sequence of the video, Sondheim states that he wants to be in control as Acker's father was when he left. Acker says that "Alan can do this also", i.e. make such a decision and take such control. Sondheim then talks of his subjectivity as underlined by

1. Kraus, C 2000.

2. Berlant, L & Edelman, L 2014, pp. 66-67.

lack of control and frames his sexual and art-making process as non-sovereign. He refers to his social and artistic subjectivities based on how he thinks that others perceive him:

AS: Alan is just a 31-year-old artist [...] Alan is not in a position to control or to manipulate lives. Alan is on the outside of everything. Alan is an underground man. Alan will remain underground.

Acker argues back that these are just Sondheim's decisions about himself, not the truth. He answers by saying:

AS: It is very hard to know whether these are decisions about myself or whether they have been decided for me. In my mind, they are not decisions I have made consciously.

In return, Sondheim ascribes power to Acker:

AS: You are a very powerful person, at this point. And god knows if you are so powerful now, what you're gonna be like in a couple of years [...] you're going to burn people, you're going to kill people baby, you really are, don't kid yourself if you don't think you are.

This is the end of the first sequence, with Kathy Acker smiling all the way through Alan Sondheim's statements about her. Chris Kraus calls those statements "prophetic" and casts Acker's smiling as a confirmation of this prophecy and her willingness to live through the dangerous agency that Sondheim attributes to her.¹

Passivity & Plagiarism.

Throughout her life-work, and in addition to appropriating other people's texts, Acker actively uses autobiography to confuse and mislead the reader, to invite the reader to question for example what is really "real" in the material they receive. In addition, she forcefully addresses a seemingly immediate need for the reader to identify with her authoring of subjectivity. For example, on the back cover of her book *Hannibal Lecter, My Father*, she writes: "This writing is all fake (copied from other writing) so you should go away and not read any of it"² and she places these words next to a picture of herself. She points towards autobiography in her texts – at times literally writing from her own life-stories without announcing it, and at times loudly suggesting that she does so even when it's false. For example, talking about *Black Tarantula* she said: "I used a lot of autobiographical material in *Black Tarantula*. I put autobiographical material next to material that couldn't be autobiographical."³ She juxtaposes and mixes these elements with the copy-pasted texts of other writers and stories she has heard, thus disrupting the potential

1. Kraus, C 2000.

2. Acker, A 1991, *Hannibal Lecter, My Father*, Semiotext(e), New York.

3. Friedman, GE 1989, "A Conversation with Kathy Acker and Ellen G. Friedman", *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 9, no. 3. Available from: Dalkey Archive Press. [22 January 2014].

narrative and/or contextual linearity that she builds towards in her books at times. As Richard Anthony Donner argues in his study of Kathy Acker's literary work, her "autobiographical material is continually reframed in such a way that it forces the reader to note that no particular representation of Acker can 'really' be she", ¹ plagiarising "the notion of autobiography, which to her always repeats versions of the same story". ²

Whilst Acker uses and reframes autobiographical literary grammars in her written works in order to guide the reader to the point that they, themselves, understand or decide that the material at stake is not purely or linearly factual, in the *Blue Tape* she uses autobiography (e.g. the 1st sequence) without clearly disrupting its rhetorics. An example of how she plagiarises the idea of the "self" in this video, is her seeming self-submission into the camera's (and the viewer's) gaze in the 7th sequence. In this scene, Acker stands in front of the camera naked apart from some jewelry and runs her hands over her skin. It starts with a close-up shot of her face. Looking at the camera, Acker touches her head with both of her hands, then her face, passes by her eyes, puts her fingers in her nostrils and then in her mouth, stretching it from both sides. The camera frame widens and she uses each of her hands to trace the opposite arm before she touches her breasts. She goes lower down to her belly and her vagina and thighs whilst the camera follows her movement downwards. Acker traces all the way down to her feet and toes, the shot zooming slightly in and out. The sequence stops when she finishes going over the whole of the front of her body, and she stands up again looking at the camera. Her serious face suggests that her action is a "presentation" of herself to the camera and to the viewer but it is also reminiscent of a child who is looking over and discovering themselves.

The ways she touches and models her body passively in front of the camera can be considered a self-submission to structures of perception, to "models of representation". ³ In this sense, she plagiarises the idea of an "original self" in the context of a lens-based work, tracing over her bare body, pulling the edges of her mouth to show that nothing hides, unexposed, inside her, leading the viewer to potentially consider that she "really" is her "self". Viewed within the context of the whole of the *Blue Tape*, a video-project grounded in the two artists using their sexual dynamic to make art from it whilst also approaching it with critical distance and detachment, which involves several methodologies of porno-graphing, Acker's method of showing her "self" to the camera is a self-submission to whatever the viewer may want to project on her. She doesn't submit to a certain role, but performs a process of self-objectification, a passive and subtle appropriation or plagiarism of how others may perceive her subjectivities.

Judith Jack Halberstam uses the terms "radical passivity" and "shadow feminism" to study works by performance artists such as Yoko Ono, Marina Abramovic and Faith Wilding. Halberstam argues that works such as Ono's *Cut Piece* (1965) and Abramovic's *Rhythm 0* (1974) suggest an "ambivalent model of female selfhood" through masochism

1. Dooner, RA 1993, *Repetition in postmodern fiction: The works of Kathy Acker, Donald Barthelme and Don DeLillo*, Ph.D thesis, University of Florida. p. 66.

2. Dooner, RA 1993, p. 59.

3. Dooner, RA 1993, pp. 13-14.

and “complete surrender”. I consider the way in which Acker silently traces her naked body for the camera in the *Blue Tape* involves a similarly passive “surrender”, which matter-of-factly¹ illustrates how she self-submits into roles of her “self”. In short, in being “herself” through her nudity – a nudity which she underlines and duplicates by tracing her body with her hands, she becomes an “unsubject”, and in doing so reflects the viewer’s perceptions back at them. Her porno-graphing methodology, then, is a form of “resistance”, of the subject who “does not speak in the language of action and momentum but instead articulates itself in terms of evacuation, refusal, passivity, unbecoming, unbeing”.²

As Dooner argues, Acker appropriates established and commonsensical structures and patterns of logic and meaning-making in order to disrupt them. Analogously I argue that her tactics of appropriation are a submission intending to critique the very thing she is submitting within. Consequently, through this scene of the *Blue Tape*, she quietly self-submits into essentially whatever the viewer wants to project onto her – but also “unravels” and “refuses to cohere” through her refusal to speak. She is one of the shadow feminist subjects “who refuse ‘being’ where being has already been defined in terms of a self-activating, self-knowing, liberal subject”.³

Too dry – Stubborn resistance and politics of production.

The 3rd sequence of the *Blue Tape* is a 6 minute and 30 second long uncut video which features Kathy Acker’s vulva and Alan Sondheim’s fingers as he tries to sexually stimulate her. The audience can hear Acker’s voice as she is directing and instructing Sondheim. The video shot is just wide enough to allow the viewer to identify the vulva and fingers as such – we see half to three quarters of the fingers covering and moving along Acker’s vulva. With intervals of few seconds she gives instructions and makes observations to Sondheim such as: “No – lower. Yeah that’s OK. Can I close my eyes. No that’s too hard. Higher. No no no no no. Yeah that’s ok. Am I too dry? Ok like better ok. Oh, that’s good. No no no not up... Uhhh that’s good... You’re really dry... Come on, concentrate. Look, augh! Shit! This is ridiculous. No no no keep going. It feels nice, I am just never gonna come... augh! shit! Amm, that’s better... Yeah I am really dry so try to not move back and forth too much... What the hell are you doing? No, come on, no.” The porno-graphing attributes of the sequence can be observed in how the two artists appear to approach sex through critical detachment, distance, resistance, negation and negativity, in short, reducing it into reports and drying it of its “juices”, literally resisting the lubrication and pleasuring of Acker’s vulva, favouring the observational and recording process of the sexual situation they author.

1. I borrow the term “matter-of-factly” from Chris Kraus, who uses it to describe the way Acker uses language in the *Blue Tape*. Kraus, C 2000.

2. Halberstam, J 2011, *The Queer Art of Failure*, pp. 129-139, Duke University Press, Durham and London.

3. Halberstam, J 2011, p. 126.

Acker and Sondheim's intentions are not framed from the outset as seeking to resolve into non-pleasure, such as the impossibility of orgasm – for example, whilst they don't include penetrative vagina/penis sex in the video, they include a physically and visually loud and visceral orgasm (Sondheim orgasming in the 6th sequence) which I will soon return to. Overall it is communicated to the viewer that the two artists' decision to “explore sexuality on tape” does not involve a pre-meditated negative stance towards sex and their own particular sexual dynamic, in fact it was the strength and “potential” of the felt dynamic that led them to make art out of it. Using porno-graphing methodologies, Acker and Sondheim put processes of sexual stimulation at play with the aim of making art and in doing so they complicate issues of reasoning, resolution and coherence concerning art-making. For example, they set themselves up to attend to their sexual dynamic as potential art-material by trying to lubricate and pleasure Acker's body, to find the “truth” or secrets of her body; in doing so they instead reach and explore the lack of such pleasure or the lack in their ability to reveal such secrets. Acker and Sondheim not managing to synchronise into pleasuring Acker can be seen as what Edelman and Berlant term as the “shock of discontinuity”.¹ Similarly the two artists not being able to discover what it is that pleasures Acker can be seen as what Edelman and Berlant call “the encounter with nonknowledge”.² What pleasures Acker remains unknown and – to the viewer – unknowable. By not confirming that their sexual chemistry – the very reason they decided to work together – “works”, both their sexual and artistic subjectivities become “undone”. This is because to create porno-graphing actions these two artists embrace “the ways that sex undoes the subject”³ and in letting themselves become “undone” they invite the viewing subject to endure similar destabilisation. By exposing the fragility of whether and how attraction “makes sense” they implicate the viewer in the process of meaning-making – staging for example their relationship, attraction and collaboration as matters that exceed the private model of enjoyment, into the domain of public reception and contemplation.

Sondheim's proposition to “explore sexuality on tapes” can be seen as a direct gesture of placing the two artists' sexual dynamic in the terrain of art – and as such in the realm of public reception, reflection and scrutiny. Therefore, the actions the two artists embark on in the making of the Blue Tape are exercises in spelling-out answers and breaking down their subjectivities and chemistry as public matters, as if staging them as public matters would contribute to the artists themselves understanding the “truth” of their encounter and its potential. However, in considering their sexual dynamic as art material, as a public matter, Acker and Sondheim complicate the spheres of the private, the public and the artistic. Instead of reaching answers and enjoyment they employ porno-graphing methods of distance, detachment and negation to approximate a void or gap⁴ at the place where clarity, sexual synchronicity and answers may be expected to be found. Through

1. Berlant, L & Edelman, L 2014, p. 4.

2. Berlant, L & Edelman, L 2014, p. 4.

3. Berlant, L & Edelman, L 2014, p. 4.

4. I use the terms “gap”, “void”, and “excess” in accordance to my discussions with Leigh Ledare. For an account of these please see: Pinaka, AM 2019, “Porno-graphing: dirtiness” and

porno-graphing methodologies, negatively and distantly-inclined “truth-telling” is manifested in “the insistent particularity of the subject, impossible fully to articulate”.¹ For example, Acker signifies “honesty” by being ruthless in admitting to her lover and collaborator that she isn’t getting turned on and she isn’t going to come.

The porno-graphing methodologies of the Blue Tape challenge and put to the test ideas about productivity, openly but with complexity. On the one hand porno-graphing methodologies straightforwardly challenge notions of futurism and productivity attached to sex due to the fact that through such methodologies sex is not used for having babies or for private enjoyment but in order to make art. However, on the other hand, making art out of sexual situations can be seen precisely as an outcome of the artist being conditioned to capitalise on their subjectivity and their unquestioned familiarity with the increasing blurring of the boundaries between “life and work, non-work and work, and production and reproduction”²; their capitalist nature so to speak. But the case with porno-graphing methodologies is that the technique of self-objectification is an acutely conscious process, which aims to maintain a strategic and stubborn apparent distance from resolution, in the same way that Acker appears to maintain a stubborn distance from getting turned on. In doing so, what falls under interrogation is precisely this blurriness of boundaries between production and reproduction, in regards to, for example, subjectivity. That is, the object/subject divide regarding identity, as it perhaps determines the value of the subject and the ways in which the subject questions how their own subjectivity is produced and by whom. In short, porno-graphing strategies adapt the process of appropriating life with the aim of production, in order to question the very frames of the production of subjectivity.

“Kathy doesn’t know” – orgasms and thinking in excess of its consciousness .

The aforementioned 3rd sequence of the Blue Tape where Acker employs a rhetorical style of matter-of-factness, appearing immediate and honest yet detached, distant, negative and dry whilst Sondheim tries to lubricate and pleasure her vagina, comes straight after a scene where Sondheim has confessed to the viewer – whispering – that Acker “doesn’t know [...] what is going on [...] what this piece is about”. Through this sequence of the video, we see Acker caressing her own breasts and hear Sondheim speaking quickly but quietly:

I don’t want you to look at that image. I don’t want that image to do anything at all for you. I am speaking really softly [...] I don’t want you to pay any attention, I want you to look to the left of the monitor and listen to

self-objectification” in Thomas Waugh & Brandon Arroyo (eds) *I Confess!: Constructing the Sexual Self in the Internet Age*. McGill Queen’s University Press, Montreal.

1. Edelman, L 2004, *No Future, Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, p. 5, Duke University Press, Durham and London.

2. Kunst, B 2015, *Artist at Work Proximity of Art and Capitalism*, p. 138-146, Zero Books, Alresford.

me talk about the world [...] You can hear me, no one else can hear me, no one else knows what is going on, Kathy doesn't know what is going on, Kathy doesn't know what this piece is. This piece is between you and me. Between me and the audience [...] One of the characteristics of the world is sexuality. I'd rather talk about sexuality than do it. I'd rather talk about a reference to the body than refer to the body [...] One of the characteristics of the world is differentiation. If this, if that [...] You thought that I would stop on sexuality but I didn't, I won't stop there I'll continue, I'll continue to produce this tape.

*Placing this as the second sequence in their video, the two artists set “not-knowing” as part of the frame within which they are making art from their sexual situation. The subtle irony through which Sondheim approaches sex and sexuality, an irony that spreads from this sequence, through another where he “melts down”, to the final one where he orgasms, is a porno-graphing tool. For example, Sondheim is being ironic in that he suggests explicitly to the viewer that Acker cannot “know what is going on” and “what this piece is” because she is so reduced to her body, as if her sexual and artistic agencies are pre-determinedly incompatible, with the result that she is unable to know or “own” the piece of work she co-authors with him. He suggests that through the presence of her sexuality (her naked body) Acker is so absent in terms of consciousness that she cannot even hear him talking. In doing so he marks the beginning of a quest regarding the smearing of theory, of its alleged clarity, with the body, “as if there were thinking which might take us elsewhere, out of the grit of the body” which is “always dirty”.¹ Sondheim's process of approaching sex and sexuality in the *Blue Tape* through self-negating, self-reflexive irony, his self-mocking, becomes more vivid in later sequences, but is also apparent here in how he “confesses” that he would “rather talk about sexuality than do it”.*

Thus, Sondheim uses negative, self-mocking traits to stage and foreground his intellect within the sexual and artistic structure of the video, and to consequently negotiate the role of thinking in sex. Sondheim takes “knowing” away from Acker and places it between him and the viewer – “this piece is between you and me” – before handing it over completely to the viewer – “no one else knows what is going on”. Whilst this piece obviously has its roots in the sexual encounter between himself and Acker, Sondheim says that this same sexual encounter is actually between him and the viewer and consequently prompts questions concerning sex and perception (such as who is involved in this sexual dynamic and how, and who can give answers). He ironically – yet through anguish – asks of the viewer that they know what he and Acker cannot know about either their dynamic or their piece of work. As far as “sex... can be seen as a name for what breaks down the fantasy of sovereignty”², and considering that non-sovereignty is the state of the self not being able to explain itself to itself, Sondheim tricks the viewer into non-sovereignty by telling the viewer that he counts on their sovereignty. In other words, Sondheim makes the viewer part of the sexual and artistic situation at play, precisely by telling them that the piece is

1. Sondheim, A 2016, pers. comm., 24 April.

2. Berlant, L & Edelman, L 2014, p. 71.

between him and them and that only they can understand “what is going on” whilst at the same time confessing his own and Acker’s inability to know. By inviting the viewer to identify with the sexual dynamic at play and by extension with the two artists’ “not knowing”, he actually invites the viewer to surrender their own ability to know as well.

At the time of the making of the *Blue Tape*, Alan Sondheim, himself a theorist as well as a visual artist, poet and musician, “had just written a three-hundred-page tract called *A General Theory of Reality*”.¹ Since the beginning of the Internet era he has been a pioneer of internet-theory – for example since “1994 he has been working on the ‘Internet Text’ a continuous meditation on philosophy, psychology, language, body, and virtuality”.² His work deals with the abject, the “entangled, tawdry, sleazy [...] the realm of death, of anguish, of sexuality, of slaughter and scorched earth politics”. He explores such themes at work within “virtual worlds, around coherent language and coherent coding”; the “digital domain”, which he considers as “always already corporate, governed by protocols, and a clean and proper body... tied to consumerism, to the clever.” He calls the “center and periphery” of his work “the cry” – what “one’s left with” when “the symbolic itself, the ability to construct and deploy language/s, no longer functions”.³ In the 5th and 6th sequences of the *Blue Tape* Alan Sondheim self-mocks and despairs over his investment in theory.⁴

Through the 6th sequence of the *Blue Tape*, Sondheim is naked, lying down on a bed holding a microphone with his left hand. His right arm is above his forehead, suggesting a laid-back stance. The sequence starts with a bust-shot of him and opens slowly. He introduces what he is going to be doing which is an analytical description of “what is happening”:

OK, this is a piece, which is a combination of an external structure and the grounding of that structure in a certain kind of sexuality. In other words, I am going to describe the situation which is being established. And at the same time would be acting the situation. And the description is going to be along the lines of *The General Theory of Reality* I’ve been working on the past year. The theory at present is 300 pages and consists of a mathematical formulism [...]

As Sondheim works through his theory the camera moves up and down his body and zooms in and out. We see Acker licking his feet, moving towards his genitals, eventually licking his anus and rubbing his penis before giving him a blowjob. Sondheim gets increasingly aroused and increasingly struggles to keep his focus on the theory – reciting:

A confusion, a real temptation, a defense, I defend myself against Kathy, I don’t want to give in, I don’t want to come, I want to be able to continue

1. Kraus, C 2000.

2. Kraus, C 2000.

3. Damon, M & Nemet-Nejat, M, 2016, “Surging toward Abjection: An Interview with Alan Sondheim”, *Rain Taxi*. Available from: <www.raintaxi.com/surging-toward-abjection-an-interview-with-alan-sondheim/> [20 May 2016].

4. Sondheim, A 2016, pers. comm., 24 April.

talking to you, to describe the theory to show how the structure of the world works so that there is, that can be a separation between me and the world, I really feel the need for this separation. Oh god. Otherwise I am likely to follow into something and realise how little I understand about things, I don't want to do that, I don't want to stop understanding... Because in a way this is a kind of a battle, holding on to my, holding on to my mind [...]

The two artists go on until Sondheim orgasms and asks that the camera stops recording. In the 5th sequence Sondheim appears to be sitting down on a kitchen floor holding a microphone. He says "I think – everybody – should buy and read – Love's Body – by Norman O. Brown". He then bursts into a two minute-long bout of loud, seemingly irrational, unreasonable or purposeless laughter, still holding his microphone close to his mouth whilst a kettle boils on a cooker behind him. The action that Sondheim calls "smearing of theory in relation to the body" operates within porno-graphing methodologies as a self-submission to the "dirtiness" of the body versus, for example, the cleanliness of theoretical resolution and the potential confidence in knowing that comes with it. Sondheim continues this same method in the following sequence where he orgasms whilst reciting his own theory-work, allowing himself to tear apart and be torn apart by his own work – into the "cry" or what he calls annihilation.¹ In this sense, the porno-graphing actions of the Blue Tape suggest and investigate a permanent branch of "dirtiness", a stubborn or un-cleanable "dirtiness", and the negativity that comes with it. Sondheim proposes that the "body is always dirty", a "dirtiness" which cannot be cleared-out or clarified through resolution or confident knowing, and thus challenges the value of determination, purpose and the "fixity of definition" by resisting attempts to define, "to break 'it'" down. For example, when Sondheim tries to break "it" down, to understand the encounter between him and Acker, and to determine it by "exploring it on tapes", he breaks down. Furthermore, the continuous trait of negativity – that his orgasm for example is not a joyful private event and the fact that it is artwork and theory-infused – creates a feedback loop into radical incoherence; a continuous attention of the subject to its "radical unrepresentability" in the form of its "undoing".²

Georges Bataille sets out a framework for transgression and excess as specifically related to unproductivity; he for example connects sex with productivity comparably to the way that some queer theorists have underlined and challenged the reproductive and reparative logics attached to sex and sexuality. Bataille unlinks sex from "erotic unions" because the reproductive character of the first in his view caters for the "world order's aim for homogeneity and individuation". Antiethically, the goals that "erotic unions" have relate with an intimacy through which the participants reach an ontology of "continuity", and is not related with reproduction but with "extreme pleasure" and also with "waste"

1. Sondheim, A 2016, pers. comm., 24 April.

2. Berlant, L & Edelman, L 2014, p. 65.

(Bataille groups “sexual indulgence” together with “gambling and drunkenness”).¹ Bataillan excess isn’t about pleasure reached through orgasm for example, but about the anguish reached through the pleasure in that orgasm – “a glance into the continuity of death”.² Under this light, and keeping in mind the example of the *Blue Tape*, the excess at play in porno-graphing actions relates to this anguish, such as Sondheim’s “cry” – the undoing of the self through “exploring” sexuality as a public subject, through not-knowing and through non-sovereignty. In short, the fact that the subject in porno-graphing actions willingly becomes undone is a form of unproductivity (versus investment into personal up-levelling and confidence) and in this sense, the undoing of the subject is a form of excess. Another way to get to how porno-graphing actions negotiate excess, considering Bataillan theory, is to think that the sexual pleasure at play in the *Blue Tape* does not offer answers and is not a resolution. On the contrary, it is used to explore and underline the “void” or “gap”, the space where things are unknowable, the “radical incoherence” – for example how Sondheim melting into his orgasm cries out that he doesn’t want to stop understanding, he wants to hold on – but he lets himself be unable to hold on to knowing.

And so sex, and pleasure in the form of orgasm, is used in porno-graphing actions, in the literal form of report and account-making through this sequence – for example where Sondheim reports to the viewer what is taking place, whilst also analysing it in relation to his body and his consciousness. Thus, through this pleasure, attention is brought back to negativity, to the reduction of sex to administration. But this methodology of negativity, dryness and administration operates as what Berlant and Edelman describe as a “mode of thought, in excess of the consciousness that tries to describe it”³ and serves as the approximation of excess, of the gap or void, of what is unknowable.

I have claimed in this text destabilisation as both a productive ground and at the same time as an effect that porno-graphing has on its’ audiences. In the *Blue Tape*, Kathy Acker and Alan Sondheim use their own non-sovereign positions – as subjects that are undone, not-knowing, radically passive, or self-mocking, to invite (or trick) the viewer into giving up their own sovereignty of looking and perceiving. The porno-graphing strategies of the *Blue Tape*, self-objectification, radical passivity and working from non-sovereign positions, draw out questions about the modes of perception that attribute meaning and value to subjectivity and to art.

1. Fuchs, R 2009, “Taboos and Transgressions: Georges Bataille on Eroticism and Death”, *Gnosis*, vol. 10, no. 3. Available from: PhilPapers [10 February 2016].

2. Fuchs, R 2009.

3. Berlant, L & Edelman, L 2014, p. 76.

MATIAS VIEGENER —
AFTERWORD (2019)

The majority of these texts were written before Kathy's breakthrough in 1973, with her first mail-art serial novel, *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*. This was the first in a trilogy that includes *I Dreamt I Became a Nymphomaniac: Imagining*, and the *Adult Life of Toulouse Lautrec* by Henri Toulouse Lautrec, written in the next two years with all soon published in paperback volumes. These three works mark Acker's transformation into the writer most readers know, characterized by ruptured narratives, philosophical interrogations, and experimentation in language. The hallmarks of her interest in veiled personal material cut with dreams, pirated texts, and narratives cut by other narratives can all be seen here, though not in their later stylistic form.

These early pieces are the results of a variety of experiments in lyricism, language, inner dialogue, and emotional probing. They attest of several formative elements in Acker's lifelong interests, foremost among them her friendships with the young strippers she met while she was working alongside them in San Diego and New York City. Their fierce stories about sex, relationships and work galvanized her and amplified the perceptions she had about gender relationships already formed through her relationships and her troubled family. The startling symmetries between these women and the other women in her life gave her an intensified outlook into what might simply be called gender dissymetry: the unbearable power relationships and psychodynamics through which the majority of women navigated their lives. We also see the fervor of her friendships with a fascinating group of lesbians in San Diego, including writers Winifred Golden and Lyn Lonidier, and composer Pauline Oliveros. They recur a few times in the early work, often in lyric studies tinged with admiration, as if Acker had found at least one exit route from the oppression of normative gender roles.

Acker and Sondheim's *Blue Tape* has a fuzzy history, the evidence of the two writer's flirtation not just with each other, but with a kind of analytical and speculative desire, worked through laboriously both on the page and onscreen. Often regarded as a work of pornography, the work surely fails the primary goal of the pornographic, to arouse the reader or viewer. Acker and Sondheim's correspondence alongside the transcription still fall short of conveying the brutalism of the final product, with its sharp edits and stern mise en scène. The video was badly received; both collaborators considered it a failure, and for the most part suppressed the video until it was rediscovered in this century. Though often called the *Blue Tape*, the proper title is *Untitled Tape* for both the first and the follow up, which is generally called the satire as the collaborators focus on the dynamics of the first tape, reversing and mocking aspects of it. *Blue Tape* appears to be an informal title that echoes the term blue movie, old slang for a pornographic film, and was possibly meant to echo Andy Warhol's *Blue Movie*, released four years earlier. His film was tinted blue because of a mistake in the film stock, which resulted in a color shift.

*The reader will note that most of these texts are not final drafts, and the editor has decided to include the typos and errors to honor the fact that Acker did not designate this material for publication. This volume was preceded by G. Kappes's 2015 chapbook of Acker's early works, Homage to Leroi Jones & Other Early Works, published in CUNY press's *Lost and Found* series. Ultimately this volume may or may not change readers' views of Acker's work, but certainly they shed light on Acker's formation and her passions. All that is missing now are reproductions of Acker's working notebooks, which illustrate her writing process in the most concrete way possible, with cuts, cross-outs, revisions, and pasted pages that demonstrate the intense materiality of her writing process. Another recent book that sheds welcome new light on the development of Acker's work is the collection, Kathy Acker: The Last Interview, which is almost a literary biography but in Acker's own words.*

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